

THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET

BY FRANK BARRETT

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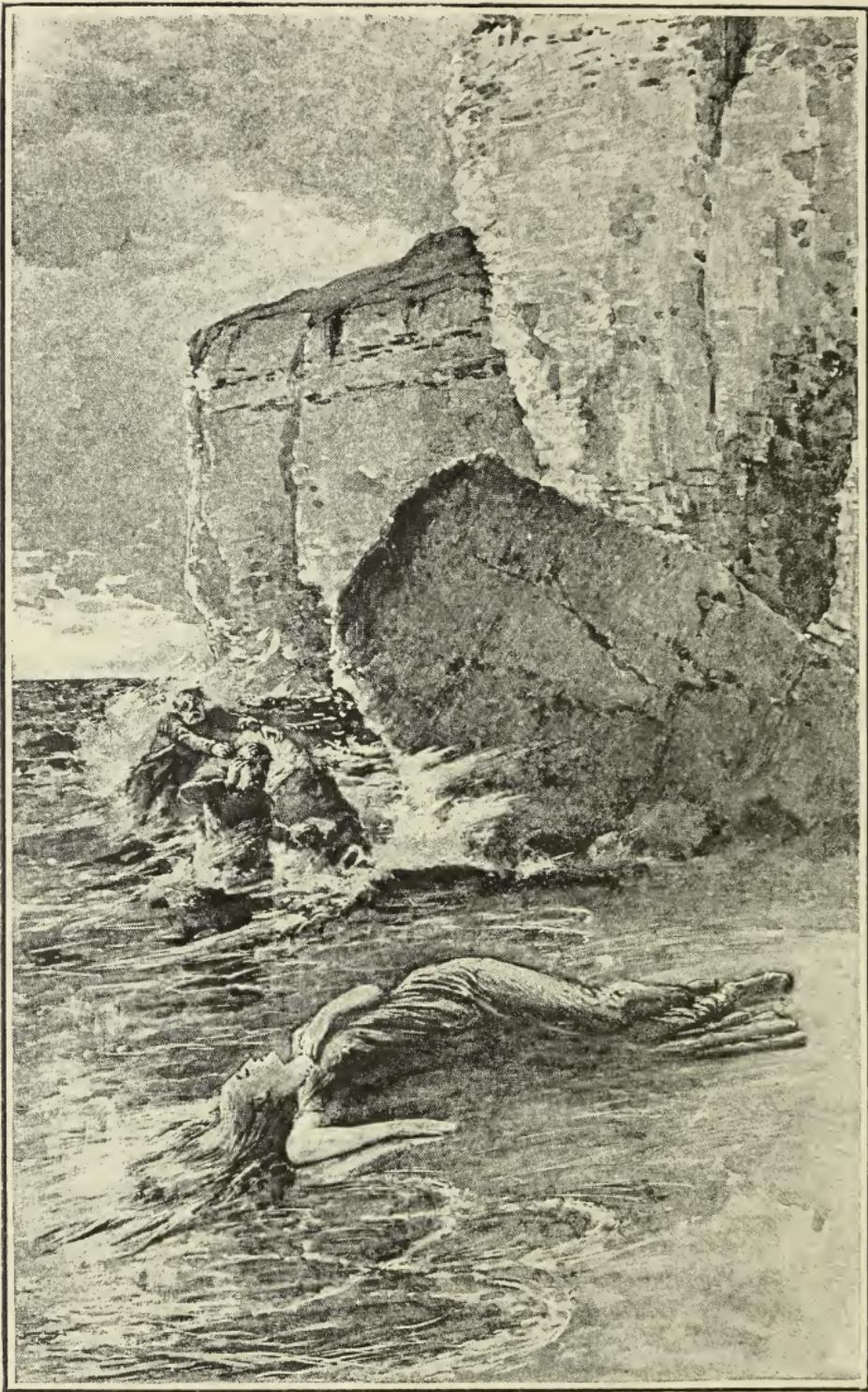
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"We dashed into the water like madmen."

THE
SMUGGLER'S SECRET

A Romance

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF

'BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH,' 'FETTERED FOR LIFE,'
'HONEST DAVIE,' ETC.

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THE SMUGGLER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

ONE morning when I went to my customary place in the library I found a glove upon my table. With a thrill of delight I recognised it, and glanced eagerly round, expecting to see Miss Duncan with a book in one of the cosy chairs. My heart fell : there was no one in the room but myself. She must have come in to write a letter and left the glove there by accident. I took it up and put it to my lips. It was soft and cool and sweet, with a delicate scent of spring flowers. I laid it on my palm and looked at it. There was the form of her hand in it ; it

had the tint of a fair skin. But oh, in colour, texture, form, and sweetness how poorly it represented the dear hand that had worn it! It was charming to the senses only because it suggested something infinitely more adorable.

With some such rhapsody as this I pressed the glove to my lips again, and then, startled by a sound, I turned and found myself face to face with Miss Duncan, who had come back for her glove. There it was, within an inch of my lips. The position was embarrassing. What was to be done? Could she take the glove with my kiss upon it, or should she turn her back on me, and leave the room in indignation? She took neither course, but she stood there with a deep blush on her face, and an unspeakable tenderness in the glance that met mine, and then she dropped her eyes, but still she stood there. It was a confession of love that I had not dared to hope for.

'Will you let me keep this glove till I

have told your father what has happened?' I asked.

'Yes, Bernard,' she answered, lifting her eyes to mine and speaking quite firmly.

I led her to the window that opened on to the lawn, and for a moment before we parted our hands clung together as those cling together which may never meet again.

As I turned from the window the door opened, and Sir Henry Duncan entered the room, with the quick, abrupt movement habitual to him. He glanced suspiciously at me, for he might have seen his daughter crossing the lawn beyond, and then stood thunderstruck on catching sight of her glove in my hand.

'What on earth does this mean, Mr. Thorne?' he asked in a peremptory tone.

I was unprepared with anything clever to say, and answered with the plain truth :

'Sir Henry, I am in love with your daughter, and this is her glove, which she has suffered me to keep.'

'Are you mad?' he asked, after looking at me in silence for a space.

I thought that madness might be an excuse for *not* loving Miss Duncan, but I did not say so, and he continued in growing anger :

'Do you forget what you are, and what my daughter is? Do you know what she is to me? Do you think I am careless of her happiness or a fool to her interests? Answer me!'

'No, Sir Henry, I do not forget what I am. I am your secretary, your servant, with nothing beyond the wages I earn. Your daughter has a fortune in her own right, and is heiress to another. I know that she is dearer to you than your life, and that you would sacrifice everything for her happiness and honour. I may add still more to the disparity between us. She is of gentle, if not noble birth; my forefathers were smugglers, and two of them are now living within five miles of this house.'

'And yet,' said he slowly and with withering scorn, 'you *dare* to think of taking my

daughter from me and making her your wife ! Knowing what you are, you have meditated dragging her down to your level ! Knowing what she is, you have had the insolence to offer her your love—you have taken the glove from her hand ! The sight of the glove maddened him. ‘ Give me that glove,’ he cried, advancing on me white with fury ; give it to me ! he repeated in a still higher tone as I drew it back. I thought he meant to take me by the throat, when suddenly he checked himself, and, turning his back upon me, stood silent, trembling with the effort to control his passion.

He was a man of strong emotions, which he habitually kept under control by constant watchfulness, and timely effort of will. Only once before had I seen him give way to immoderate anger, and then, as on this occasion, the outburst sprang from an event which seemed to threaten his daughter’s welfare. On that occasion, as on this, it was only by a supreme effort that he governed his fury.

He was comparatively calm when he faced me again, but sweat beaded his forehead and his face was ashy gray.

'How long has this been going on?' he asked hoarsely.

'I have loved your daughter three years—ever since I came into this house. I did not meditate making her my wife. If she had given me any reason to hope, by one word, one look, I could not have kept my secret—I could not have stayed here her father's servant.'

'That is to say that now you keep your secret no longer you *do* hope?'

'Yes.'

'Hope what?'

'Hope one day to make your daughter my wife. Listen to me, Sir Henry. I have shown my position at its worst. I have told you that my mother's parents were smugglers, but my father was an honest man. Your daughter can say no more for you than that. My character is unstained. I claim moral equality with any man that lives ;

what more than love and honour do you wish for in the man who must one day be your daughter's husband?

'What more? — position, wealth. Your moral excellence should enable you to see that you cannot maintain my daughter in the station to which she has been accustomed on the salary of a secretary.'

I was silent, not knowing how to meet an objection that had never for a moment presented itself to my consideration.

'Would you ask your wife to pay your tailor's bill?' Sir Henry asked, seeing his advantage.

'I must have money,' I said, with a faltering voice; 'I never thought of that.'

'You should have thought of that before you asked my daughter to be your wife.'

'I have not asked her, and,' I added, piqued by his tone, 'I will not until I can lay a fortune at her feet.'

'Now I believe that you are a man of principle,' said Sir Henry, giving me his hand with a cynical smile. 'I am told there is a

perfect Golconda in South Africa ; I advise you to go and find your fortune.'

'I will make my fortune or never see my love again,' I said to myself in desperation as I turned my back on The Chase ; but in my heart I felt that it was a forlorn hope.

CHAPTER II.

I HAD lodgings in an isolated cottage which had once been a toll - house on the old London Road, just outside the park gates of The Chase. My landlady, Mrs. Benham, was an old gentlewoman and a widow, with a son at sea. She was sitting at her tambour frame by the parlour window, and rose in astonishment, when the latch of the garden gate clicked, to see me at such an unusual hour. I had been her sole companion for three years, save at those rare intervals when her son made a flying visit; and when she heard that I had come to pack up my belongings and leave her she burst into tears, confessing that it grieved her more to lose me than her own son. But seeing that I had a sore trouble of my own to bear, she,

like a true woman, thrust her own grief aside, and did her best to give me hope and courage. I got the parting over as quickly as possible, and then, with the small portmanteau which contained all the personal effects that I needed, I struck out across the downs in the direction of Sandhaven. The brisk sea breeze revived my spirits, and by the time I reached the cliff path a dozen hopeful projects were revolving in my mind.

I flattered myself with the reflection that I was in a far better position to make my way in the world successfully than many others who had won fortunes; for besides energy, strength, and health, and a strong incentive to make the most of them, I had over fifty pounds in my pocket and a little property, which I resolved to turn into money at once. This property consisted of a cottage and a few acres of ground upon the cliff, midway between Sandhaven and Towerbridge. It was called the Half-way House, and had quite a romantic history. Originally, it

belonged to my great-grandfather, Peter Beamish, and a desperate rascal he was, according to all accounts. Even now, at the age of ninety-four, the oldest and most disreputable inhabitant in Bonport, signs of indomitable will, cunning, and reckless daring were evident in the great hooked nose that almost met his chin, the dark slits of eyes gleaming like jet under the shaggy white penthouse of his overhanging brows, and in the quick, abrupt, decisive movements of his shrunken old limbs. He was a tyrant in his domestic relations, and would have no women or children in his house. When his son Ben (my grandfather) married, the wife was sent to live with her mother-in-law in Sandhaven, and Ben was permitted to go and see her on Sundays, unless business prevented. In comparison with his father Ben was a cherub, a meek, inoffensive man, a rascal, doubtless, but one who would have preferred to fall in with the times and exercise his rascality in a respectable way. But there was no resisting the authority of

his father, who used him as a tool and kept him under from first to last—treating him as a mere boy when old Ben was white-headed. At that time these two, father and son, kept the Half-way House as an inn, but in reality it was nothing but a store for contraband goods and a rendezvous for the gang of smugglers of which my great-grandfather was captain.

All along that part of the coast the soft cliff is undermined by the encroaching sea. There was a cavern on the shore into which the cargoes were run, and it was said there existed a secret way of communication between the cave on the shore and the house on the cliff. In those days the preventive service was inefficient, and the revenue men kept away from the Half-way House as much as possible, the company there being constantly the worse for liquor, and using their pistols as freely as we might use lucifer matches. It was, in fact, dangerous for anyone to go near the place.

The gang was composed of rascals of

various nationalities, but among them was one called French Peter, to distinguish him from my great-grandfather, who was almost as masterful as the acknowledged captain. The two Peters quarrelled, and there was a split in the camp, when French Peter, to be avenged on his enemy, fired a keg or two of gunpowder in the cavern, and brought down an enormous slice of the cliff, completely choking the cavern, and rendering it unapproachable from the sea. That ruined English Peter and his faithful adherents ; and his occupation being gone, he sold the cottage to my father, who had then lately married Susan Beamish, my grandfather's only child.

My father was captain of a coaster. He was wrecked soon after my birth, and my mother, taking her loss to heart (for my father was a good and loving husband), died a year after, leaving the cottage and all she possessed to me by will. Just then my great-grandfather came to grief and got seven years' imprisonment, and my grand-

father, seeing that smuggling was no longer a profitable vocation, reformed. He had always hankered after a sneaking, safe, respectable way of living, and being released from thraldom to his father, he took posession of the Half-way House, signed the pledge—several times—and undertook to bring me up in the way I should go.

When my great-grandfather came out of prison he was disgusted with the change in men and manners that had taken place during his seclusion. The day of smuggling was past. He refused to dwell in the Half-way House, declaring that the smell of whitewash made him sick. How he lived was a mystery. He spent a great part of his days and nights in the alehouses, for comfort, in the villages round and about; sometimes he was to be seen sitting on a spar at the end of the pier at Bonport scowling out at the sea; but regularly every month he came over to the Half-way House and stayed there for two days to 'let the boy go for a bit of a spree,' as he put it. And old Ben

availed himself of this opportunity, going off to some village where he was not well known, and could get drunk without outraging the feelings of those who helped to reform him and contributed considerably to his maintenance. But why they should never leave the house together was a fact that often perplexed me.

And now, reaching the crest of Deadman's Point, I saw the square, one-storied cottage on the cliff, with the sea bursting over the detached mass at its base which marked the close of evil days.

To my surprise I found the doors locked and the blinds drawn when I reached the cottage. There was no response to my knock, and I was beginning to think that my grandfather for once had left the cottage unguarded and gone for a spree without his father's sanction, when the rattle of a piece of mortar on the tiles caused me to lift my eyes, and I caught sight of my grandfather peering through the half-opened shutter of the dormer window in the roof.

'I'm coming down, sonny,' said he blandly, finding himself perceived. 'I was taking of a doze, sonny,' he explained, when he opened the door to me.

He was a fair-skinned, apple-faced old man, with pleasant blue eyes. He had a trick of passing his tongue round his mouth after speaking, as if in search of a missing tobacco plug. But for that you would never have thought him guilty of any unpleasant habit; yet I knew he was telling a lie, for there on the table was a dish of smoking hot potatoes. I did not then wait to consider why he should make a secret of eating his dinner, but struck at once into the subject I had come there to discuss. In a few hasty words I told him that I had left The Chase for ever, and was going abroad. He looked at me in mute astonishment for a moment, and then, slapping his leg gleefully, exclaimed :

'What, you've done the trick and cut your cable, sonny? Well, I didn't think it was in you, that I didn't! What a mortal pity

father ain't here! This would have been a treat for him. And him that thinks so mean of you, too, that he always spits when he hears your name. Give it me,' he said, stretching out his hand for my portmanteau eagerly.

'No,' said I, 'I can't stay; I must be off at once.'

'Of course you must. But you give me that, boy. Oh, if father was here now, wouldn't he be all agog! Give it me; I warrant I'll put it where no one can find it.'

'No, I shall take it with me,' I said, holding on to the portmanteau, which he would certainly have taken from me if he could.

'What!' he exclaimed, 'going to run your cargo in broad day?'

'I don't understand you at all.'

'D—— it all, what are you got in your bag?' he roared.

'Nothing but my clothing.'

He dropped into the settle with a look of deep dejection.

'Well, if I didn't make sure you'd bolted with the family plate,' said he, 'and had come here to get your old grandfather to keep it up dark till you'd got comserably out of the way. Nothing but clothes; thank God father *ain't* here; how he would ha' gone on at us! Well, what the old 'un *have* you come here for?'

'I want money.'

'You ain't going to ask me rent for this cottage, which your mother, if she'd had any sense of respect and duty, would have left to me, are you? Look here, sonny, I sent you to a good school and kept you there till you were rising sixteen, and I guv you a eddication fit for a Lord Mayor, so as you've been able to move in the highest suckles as secer-tary ever since, and I've reckoned it out that the expense of that covers all I ever received as trustee for Susan.'

I knew exactly how much money my mother had left in addition to the house, and how much my grandfather had spent on my education. There was still a balance due to

me, and he had never paid a penny for the rent of the cottage. I was sure that he and his father had means beside, and so I did not hesitate to tell him plainly that I intended to sell the cottage, and if he would not buy it I should offer it at once to the land agent at Bonport, who had already written twice to me to know if I was disposed to sell.

‘Have you thought what’s to become of your poor old grandfather if you turn him out of house and home, you grasping, grinding, hard-hearted boy?’ he asked, beginning in a whine and ending in a growl.

‘Your father has not a cottage to himself; why should you need one?’ I asked. ‘Can’t you live with him?’

‘Live with father! and who would give me coals and blankets then in the winter, and tracks to light my pipe with all the year round? Oh, I wish one of those Scripsher-readers would drop in on you now, and soften your hard young heart, you gallus Philistine taskmaster.’

I turned to the door; he sprang up and came after me.

'Wait, sonny,' he cried; 'do you really mean to sell the place to old Fenwick?'

'I must if you can't buy it.'

Seeing that I was determined not to be moved either by whining or growling, his manner changed completely; there was the strangest mixture of dread and cunning calculation in his blue eyes as he drew the soft loose folds of his cheek down betwixt his thumb and fingers.

'I must go and see father,' he said. 'How much do you want?'

'I can't go with less than a hundred pounds.'

'You shall have it by to-morrow morning,' he said. I hesitated. 'Fenwick,' he added, 'wouldn't give you the money down on the spot.'

This was possible.

'Very well,' said I. 'To-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, I will come here, and if the money is ready you shall have the cottage.'

'And you won't go to Fenwick in the meanwhile ?'

'No ; I promise you.'

'Take your oath on it, sonny,' he said, 'and I'll take my oath you shall have the money. Take your oath, sonny.'

I repeated my promise and went away, wondering why the old man clung so strenuously to the possession of the cottage. Clearly, he himself had not the money, or with the dread of my selling it over his head he would not have delayed the payment uselessly till the next day. His father certainly seemed to be in poorer circumstances than he, and knowing the contempt in which he held my grandfather, it was a crowning mystery how the latter proposed, with such assurances of success, to get the loan of such a sum of money from him.

At Sandyhaven I took a room for the night at the Trusty Mariner Inn. While I was eating a chop in the little parlour that looked upon the High Street, I saw my grand-

father coming down the hill at the settled pace of a man with a long march before him. Opposite the inn he paused and cast a wistful glance down the sanded steps into the open bar. He shook his head and made a few irresolute steps forward, then paused again, glancing up and down the street for possible Scripture-readers, as he stroked his flaccid cheeks and rolled his tongue round his mouth. Finally, with a stamp that seemed to say, ‘Hang it all, I can’t help it!’ he turned back and stumped down into the tap-room. He was there when I went out for a stretch in the afternoon, and he was ‘yarning’ with some kindred spirits; he was there when I came back in the evening, and he was singing a sentimental old-fashioned song with a cracked and quavering voice; he was there when I went up to my room at ten o’clock, and in high dispute, interlarding his argument with scraps of Scripture and oaths enough to make one’s flesh creep. Shortly after that I heard the landlady exhorting him to go home like a good man, and his friends

encouraging him to come out in the fresh air and pull himself together.

There was a scuffling on the sanded floor of the bar and on the steps leading up to the street as if he were trying to carry out these suggestions ; then followed a heavy fall and a shrill cry of alarm from the landlady. I ran downstairs. My grandfather was looking vacuously about him in the arms of those who were trying to lift him. He tried to stand upright ; his left leg gave under his weight—it was broken—and with a scream of pain he dropped down on the floor again. I straightened the leg that had doubled under him.

‘ He’s fainted, sir ; open his collar,’ said the landlady, bustling off to get water.

I unbuttoned the collar of his gray shirt. Underneath I found a leather thong with a little bag attached to it, such as old seamen sometimes use for carrying a caul as a charm against drowning. He opened his eyes and looked stupidly up in my face for a moment ; then, as he felt my fingers on his throat, for

the thong seemed to press upon his wind-pipe, he made a sudden grasp at the little bag with a look of terror in his face wholly inexplicable to me.

' You've taken it out,' he cried in a fury, feeling the leather bag and rubbing it between his thumb and fingers to find if the contents were there; ' you've opened it— you've seen it !'

' No,' said I; ' I have not touched the bag.'

The fright had sobered him. He thrust the bag back and buttoned his shirt over it, glaring at me suspiciously the while ; and then he covered it with his two hands, clasping the treasure as if his life depended on it, forgetting the physical pain that had made him lose consciousness in the terrible dread of losing his secret.

CHAPTER III.

A MATTRESS was brought down into the parlour and my grandfather was laid on it, while his late companions of the tap-room made as straight as their legs permitted to Bonport, to fetch a famous bone-setter who lived there. It was a difficult matter to get him out of bed and persuade him that there was real need of his services, and that those services would be paid for. Three hours elapsed before he made his appearance at the Trusty Mariner, and during that time my grandfather lay on his back suffering acute pain, never for a moment removing his hands from the little bag on his chest. At one moment, after attempting to change his position, it seemed as if the pain would deprive him again of consciousness. He

groaned, and the sweat came out upon his face ; imploring me with his eyes to come nearer, and, panting for breath, he whispered :

‘Sonny, if I should go off in a swound, you won’t take no mean advantage to get at this here little bag, will you ?’

I promised him I would neither touch the bag myself nor let anyone else touch it, whatever happened.

‘But if I shouldn’t come back out of my swound,’ he gasped, ‘if I should go right off, and there’s no fetching me round anyhow, say by ten o’clock to-morrow morning, you must open the bag and see what’s inside on it—do you hear ?’

He made me repeat my promise to observe these wishes when the bone-setter told him to prepare his mind for some nasty twinges.

After the painful operation was over and he felt comparatively easy, my grandfather’s spirits revived.

‘Sonny,’ he said, ‘I’ll be popped into a

handbarrer and wheeled off to the cottage at once. I shall be as right as a trivet about the afternoon.'

The bone-setter laughed.

' You'll stay where you are,' he said. ' Why, you won't be able to move out of bed for a week or two; and when you get back to your cottage you'll have to keep someone constantly about to help you.'

' Keep someone in the cottage to help me!' he gasped. The idea seemed to fill him with terror, and he said no more for a long while, but lay with his mouth agape, as if unable to realize his position or see any way of accommodating himself to circumstances.

It was three o'clock in the morning when I turned into bed. At eight I arose and went down to see my grandfather. He was wide awake, and greeted me with a look of satisfaction.

' I've been heaving the lead all night, sonny,' said he; ' but I think I've got my

soundin's now. You must go and find father. Better go now 'mediately.'

'Don't bother yourself about that,' said I, thinking he was troubled with the prospect of my selling the cottage; 'I can wait a few days for the money.'

'It ain't that,' he replied impatiently. 'You must go and find father, I tell you. You go to Bonport now at once, and find Mrs. Ed'ards, the gen'al shop in Mermaid Street. You go upstairs, and if father's at home tell him I'm took queer, and he's wanted. If he ain't at home, go and look for him on the pier, and if that's no good, have a look in at the Dolphin, and likewise the Hearty Tar, and the Three Mugs, and the Hanchor; in fact, you'd better try all the beershops and publics one arter the other as you come to 'em; but find him you must. And I'll tell you for why'—he dropped his voice, and looked suspiciously at the door, as if he feared an eavesdropper—'it's a matter of life or death.'

I looked at him in doubt, but the strenuous

expression in his face indicated clearly enough that he had said no more than the bare truth.

‘What’s the clock now?’ he asked.

‘Eight.’

‘And what o’clock did I start on this gallus cruise?’

‘It was between twelve and one when you came in here.’

He reckoned up the intervening hours on his fingers, and then said emphatically:

‘You must be off this minute. There’s not a instant to lose. You must find father and bring him here by twelve at the outside.’

‘And supposing he’s not to be found?’

‘Then the Lord ha’ mercy on us!’ he exclaimed, clapping his hand on his wet forehead. ‘Now, look here, if you don’t find him by, say, half-past eleven, you must start back here. You can do it in a hour, stepping out smart. That brings it to half-past twelve. You’ll have something awful to answer for if you’re not back by then,’ he added impressively.

I saw there was no time to waste in inquiries, great as the inducement was to satisfy my curiosity, and buttoned up my coat for a sharp walk.

'Sonny,' called the old man, as I was about to leave the room, 'jest one word. Don't tell father I've broke my leg. Tell him I'm took queer, that's all. He wouldn't stand no setting of it if he knew my leg was broke—he'd have it off, he would. He is *such* a man for doing things thorough.'

I snatched a hasty breakfast, and hurried over the cliffs to Bonport. There I called first at my great-grandfather's lodgings. The chandler had not seen him for two days. 'He goes away for a spell now and again,' she said. I tried the beerhouses all along the straggling High Street, and, coming to the pier, questioned the gangs of loafers at the end. Everyone knew old Peter, but none had seen him for the last day or two, nor could anyone give a hint as to where he might be found. 'He takes it in his head the beer ain't strong enough, or the bacca's

bad, or something,' it was explained, 'and off he goes for to find better elsewhere. Sometimes he goes to one place, and sometimes to another; but there's no regular telling where fancy will lead the old man. And he don't tell anyone where he's going, or ask anyone's advice, being a world too masterful to think you can know better 'an what he do.'

At half-past eleven I gave up the search as hopeless, and returned to Bonport.

'I forecast it,' said my grandfather when he heard of my ill-success; 'it's al'ust in foul weather you lose a thole-pin, and after that, Lord knows what you won't fall foul on. Shet that door close, sonny: I've got a someat to say to you as no mortal man must know.'

I closed the door and went back to his bedside.

'You're got to take your dying oath of secrecy—your sacred, dying oath,' he said solemnly, screwing his brows together.

'You may tell me what you please,' said

I ; ‘but I shall not bind myself to anything.’

‘This comes of giving you a good eddication. Why, my father would knock my head off if I dared to answer him in that disobedient spirit, and here am I nigh on seventy-two years old. You won’t take your dying oath ?’

‘No.’

‘Come, sonny, you ain’t such a unnatural young viper that if I told you something as might cause the death of a innocent old man you’d go and let it out to all the world ?’

‘It is not likely that I would.’

‘Then without taking no oaths you kind of give your solemn promise that you won’t let anyone know what I’m going to tell you. We won’t argify the matter, but take it for settled.’ He drew his hand from under the bedclothes and put a key in my hand. ‘This is the key of the cottage. You’re got to go up there directly.’ He dived under the clothes and brought up another key. ‘This is the key of the well in the

washus,' he said, with some trepidation. ' You'll unlock the cover and let down some victuals in the bucket. When you feel the bucket touch the bottom, you'll whistle like as if you was calling a dog ; then you'll count fifty slow, and pull up the bucket. After which you'll shet the cover down, lock it careful, come out of the house and lock that careful, and so bring both keys back to me in not less than two hours at the outside.'

' What is at the bottom of the well ?' I asked in amazement. I could see, as he narrowed his eyes and passed his tongue round his mouth, that he was preparing a lie for me.

' What's down there ?' he said ; ' why, a live thing. What live things do they gen'ally keep at the bottom of a pit ? Why, bears. That's it. It's a bear. It's a pet of father's. I don't say but what he's mad to keep a bear ; that's neither here nor there. He'd just take and knock my brains out if I didn't keep it alive, and now you know

why I've been so anxious to find him, and in such a pickle about not getting home.'

He seemed perfectly satisfied with this outrageously artless explanation, and quite confident that I accepted it for the truth.

'And what victuals am I to put in the bucket?' I asked.

'There's a bit of pork on the washus shelf—cut a rasher about a half of a inch thick; and there's biled taters, put in three; and likewise there's a loaf of bread, cut a slice of that middlin' thin, about a inch and a half or two inches through.'

Having given me these instructions, my grandfather exhorted me to do just what I was told to do and no more, to come away the moment I had done it; warning me that if his father discovered that I knew of his keeping a bear ('which,' he said, 'is contrary to the laws'), he, as like as not, would take my life to prevent any evil consequences to himself.

It was something more than mere curiosity that hastened me to the cottage. My grand-

father's explanation was altogether untenable. However mad my great-grandfather might be, I knew that he was not mad enough to keep a bear at the bottom of a well, nor was my grandfather mad enough to prescribe such a bill of fare for an animal of that kind. The only feasible conjecture was that their prisoner was human and a dire enemy, whom they had not the courage to kill outright. I found the cottage as it was when I reached it the day before. The drawn blinds and locked doors, the steaming potatoes on the table, were understandable now; I had come there at the moment when my grandfather was about to feed the captive.

The washhouse adjoined the living-room. It was paved with red bricks, and lit by a skylight in the lean-to roof. A shelf ran round it, on which stood culinary utensils and articles of food. The walls and the woodwork of the roof were whitewashed. The well was sunk in the middle of the room —the shaft guarded by a circular wall about two feet high, and closed by an oak cover

hinged on one side and padlocked on the other. A bucket hung over it, swivelled on a rope, that passed through a pulley on one of the roof joists, and ran to a cleet on the wall, where it was fastened.

With considerable agitation I unfastened the padlock, lifted the cover, and looked down : I could see nothing beyond a few feet of brickwork ; I heard nothing.

‘ Is anyone down there ? ’ I called.

There was no reply but the echo of my own voice as it rang down the shaft. The silence troubled me. The hollow ring of my voice scared me. I looked about and found a candle and a box of matches on the shelf. Unfastening the rope, I lowered the bucket to the level of the circular wall, set the candle inside and lit it ; then letting the cord slip slowly through my hands, I watched the descent of the light. It grew fainter and fainter, until at length it failed to show the surrounding brickwork, and I saw nothing but a faint halo round the speck of light. The well seemed to be interminably deep.

As the knot that finished the rope's end came into my hand the bucket reached the bottom, and the handle struck the side with a clatter that rung up to my ear about two seconds after.

If a body had been lying at the bottom, the bucket must almost of necessity have struck it, and not the bottom as it did. If a man had been standing upright some gleam of reflected light must have discovered him. I saw absolutely nothing but the steady speck of light and its halo. I drew the bucket up, and dropped it twice or thrice, and called again without any result. ‘Could my grandfather have been delirious when he sent me on this wild-goose chase?’ I asked myself, as I slowly drew up the bucket to the top.

Reflecting that I had not yet carried out his instructions, I determined to make one last experiment. I took out the candle and charged the bucket with the eatables named by my grandfather, lowered them down, and whistled as if calling a dog. It seemed to

me, as I listened while counting fifty, that I heard a movement below, and I counted an additional twenty to give the thing a fair trial. When I drew up again, to my intense astonishment, I found that the food had been taken out, and an empty pitcher put into the bucket. My grandfather had forgotten to mention drink, and the creature below had sent up the pitcher as a reminder. Clearly, whatever the thing was it had hands.

I filled the pitcher from a tub of clear water that stood in one corner of the washhouse, and sent it down, completely bewildered by the mystery. When it touched the bottom I whistled again and listened.

Then from below there came up the queerest elfish and most plaintive sound I ever heard. It was like nothing more than the swelling rise and fading fall of an *Æolian harp*.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT was to be done? When I again lowered a light the sound ceased, and nothing was visible. An athlete could have slipped down the bucket rope and possibly have come up again hand over hand. But that was beyond my power, even if I had found courage to make the attempt and face the unknown. Certainly I must go down there and find out the secret of the villainous old smuggler, my great-grandfather. I felt sure that my grandfather, always under the domination of his father, was playing but an accessory part in this dramatic business, and I saw the necessity for acting with caution to accomplish an investigation successfully. At present the only thing to be done was to

allay my grandfather's suspicion as much as possible.

I closed the well, left the bucket hanging as I found it, and quitted the cottage, locking the door after me. On my way over the cliffs an explanation of one anomaly suggested itself to me. It had struck me in taking a last glance at the washhouse that it was a queer place for a well to be sunk, for the house stood within a hundred yards of the cliff's edge. To be sure, a great mass of the cliff had fallen away, and at one time it might have tapped a reservoir for a stream percolating through the chalk. But now I accounted for its existence there by a more satisfactory conclusion. It was the secret way that was said to have been used for communicating with the caves on the shore. It was quite possible that, invisible from the top, an outlet at the bottom led laterally into the choked caverns. That hypothesis accounted for my seeing no one at the bottom of the shaft when I let down the light.

I said nothing about the pitcher, or the

strange sounds, or my suspicions, to my grandfather when I returned; but I feigned to be prodigiously curious with respect to the bear, and how it came there.

‘Young ‘uns don’t oughter ask questions,’ replied the old man, very well pleased with my pretended simplicity. ‘All they’re got to do is to mind what’s said to ‘em ; that’s what father has been hammering into me these last seventy years. Now you’re got to go over to Bonport and find father, d’ye see ? You’re got to go and look into all the beer-shops and leave word everywhere that his son wants him—being took queer. And if he ain’t to be found at Bonport you can go over to Stringham, and Shoreby, and Puntness, and you might likewise run over to Tower-bridge. When you’re found him tell him you want a hundred pounds. I dare say he’ll bully you at fust, but if he sees you going off to old Fenwick, the land agent, he’ll come down with the money, I warrant. Then when you’re got the money you can slip your cable and run for fureign parts at once, because it

ain't right for young 'uns to be hanging about doing nothing. Send father on to me, but you needn't come back yourself. You clap on all sail while the wind's fair. Now that's what you're got to do. But look here, if you do not find father by to-morrow morning, you're got to come back here by noon, because there ain't no one else to feed that gallus bear—d'ye see ?'

I told him I did see, and left him.

As soon as I had finished my dinner, I went to a ship's chandler, and bought a coil of sixty fathoms of stout hemp cord. With the aid of a lad I carried it to the cottage on the cliff. I paid the boy, and waited until he was well out of sight before beginning my work.

I had to break into the house, for, as it may be imagined, my grandfather had taken the keys from me on my return, and slipped them under his pillow.

The simplest way was to get through a window ; so having broken a pane of glass with a stone, I unfastened the catch and lifted

the sash. This done, entrance was simple enough. I hauled the cord into the wash-house, and, finding a hatchet, with a few vigorous strokes I split the cover of the well where it was attached to the hinge, and threw it open. Then I unhitched the rope from the cleet in the wall, setting the bucket on the edge of the well, and firmly knotted the end to the cord I had brought with me. This done, I put the hatchet, and a stout jack-knife that I found on the shelf, into the bucket for my protection, for it seemed to me not unlikely that the captive, whoever he might be, ignorant of my intentions, might attempt to wreak upon me the vengeance he owed his captors. A couple of candles and a box of matches completed my equipment, and then, getting upon the low wall, I stepped into the bucket, slipped the end of the cord through the handle, and, pulling myself up an inch, swung over the shaft.

My heart stuck in my throat as I swung there, realizing my perilous position and

the possibly greater risks I was about to encounter; then, my courage returning, I began slowly to pay out the rope. When the knot that joined the two ropes hitched under the handle of the bucket, I paused again. I was now halfway down, and for the rest of the descent must trust to the rope I had bought at the chandler's. What if it were rotten or faulty in some part?

There was no going back, that was certain; and so, after a moment's indecision, I suffered the knot to slip past the handle and let myself down as slowly as I could, lest the friction should injure the cord, bethinking me that I should have to return, as well as descend, in safety. It struck me also that I had omitted to see that my new cord was as long as the other—a stupid oversight that might have cost me my life—and now I handled it more carefully than ever, lest I should find myself suddenly with the end in my hand. But at length, to my great satisfaction, the strain on the rope came to an end, and I found myself at the bottom of the

shaft, with a good length of cord to spare.

I could see nothing but the faint glimmer of light in the washhouse over my head ; the rest was to my eyes absolute obscurity. An audible movement on my right hand caused me to dive into the bucket for a weapon of defence. I found the jack-knife, and, opening it, stood ready for the attack, at the same time saying, with as steady a voice as I could command, ‘Whoever is down here, I am his friend.’

There was no answer, no repetition of the sound, and I think the silence had a more terrifying effect upon my senses than if I had been aroused by the fiercest and most menacing voice. I felt that I might be standing within arm’s reach of an unseen foe preparing to spring upon me. To put an end to this suspense I stuck the open knife between my teeth and struck a match.

As I expected, I found a bricked opening before me ; but the light of the match was insufficient to reveal anything more than a few

feet of brickwork on each side ; beyond, the darkness was impenetrable.

I drew out one of the candles and lit it, throwing down the match when the wick caught. The next moment, as I was about to step sideways from the bucket, I heard a sharp hiss, and looking down, with my candle raised, found that the step, if taken, would probably have been my last. I was not nearly at the bottom of the shaft, but only on a plank set across it; the hissing sound was caused by the falling of the lighted match into the water below. The cunning of the old smugglers who had used the well as a secret passage to the caves was evident in this, for, the plank being removed, water would have been drawn from the well to disprove any suspicion of inquiring revenue officers.

This escape, and the shock it gave to my nerves, made me still more cautious in my advance. With the light held out before me in my left hand, and the open knife in my right, I made my way slowly, and, I must own, with a most unpleasant sensation of

fear, along the bricked passage. Presently I found myself at the entrance to a cave, spacious and lofty, shored up at intervals with planks and great ship-timbers. The white chalk, reflecting the rays of the candle, made the cavern comparatively light. In front of me was a mass of débris sloping up to the roof, where the fallen cliff choked the shore entrance ; but I could see no sign of any habitant nor hear any sound.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a loud caw, and, shifting the candle, I perceived in a recess that had been thrown into darkness by the shadow of a beam a smooth slab of chalk, on which was set the pitcher I had lowered in the morning, and beside it a piece of the bread, on which a jackdaw was perched. He looked up at me for a moment with his gray eye, and then set to work again digging out the crumb vigorously. This could not be the captive—‘ the bear ’—yet I saw no one else.

I stepped towards the recess : the jackdaw ceased pecking at the bread, eyed me askance,

and, not liking the look of me, hopped off still further into the darkness.

I followed on, and found the recess to be an opening into a second cave. By the side of the slab there were some rags neatly arranged on a boulder to form a cushion. I had no doubt now that I should find the real captive in the next cave. Surely enough, I did ; and a strange one it was, too.

A second caw from the jackdaw drew my eye at once to the left of the entrance to the second cave, and there, in a kind of alcove, hung about with strips of coloured rag in a barbarous attempt at decoration, I saw, crouching upon a litter of straw overspread with blankets, a child with long hair falling over her shoulders. The jackdaw was perched on her shoulder, and, in contrast with its plumage, the child's hair seemed quite white. I could not see her face, for she had covered it with her thin white hands to shut out what, to her unaccustomed senses, was a blinding light—the candle—to me a feeble glimmer.

CHAPTER V.

I PUT the candle in a crevice and wedged in a piece of chalk before it, so subduing the light as to make it bearable to the poor thing's eyes, and then I gently drew her hands from her face and raised her to her feet. She was a tall slip of a girl, quite a child seemingly, though in reality she was eighteen. Her colourless face was long and thin, but her features were modelled with exquisite delicacy. She looked like one of those frail and tender plants that are reared in darkness. The darkness and lustre of her eyes gave to this strange pale face an expression more than human—something spiritual, and not of our world. I found that the retina was almost invisible, and by long disuse had lost its power of

contraction, while the pupil had become abnormally distended to catch the scant rays of light diffused in the caverns. She was dressed in a sack of blue serge, without sleeves—a garment fashioned to the idea of fitness evolved by my grandfather; yet this rude garment looked well upon her, falling to the graceful curves of her figure, and throwing into relief the long white arms and pretty nude feet; it seemed to me that a dress of modern cut would have been less in character with her unnatural beauty, and have pronounced her still more pathetically not of our world. We stood looking at each other in silent amazement, for pity choked me.

Presently she lifted her hand slowly and touched my moustache; then, walking to the back with a step as graceful as the rise and dip of a gull on the wing, she looked at my head, and finding that my hair was cut short, she clapped her hands together, and burst into a peal of laughter. Then she came round to look me in the face again, and finding the tears running down my cheek—

for her laughter told a tale of life-long captivity in this sunless prison that touched my heart to the quick—she became instantly grave, her own eyes filled, and with inarticulate sounds of sympathy she stroked my head, as though she would console me for the loss of my hair, which she must have conceived was the cause of my grief.

‘ Cannot you speak, you poor little thing ? ’ I asked.

The sound alone was intelligible to her, and she responded with sounds that were but a musical echo of my words. Hearing her voice, the jackdaw cawed, and she replied with a caw as like his as she could accomplish. Clearly, she had no notion of speech, and it was hopeless to think of getting from her any explanation of her strange condition, and how she came there. Had she never learnt the use of speech, or had she been there so long that the early days of her childhood were forgotten, I wondered. I tried her again, saying a few words in the few languages that I knew. She listened

attentively, smiling as if it gave her pleasure to hear the sound of a human voice, but showing no other signs of intelligence; then she, to give variety to the amusement, sang, making a kind of music like that I had heard from the mouth of the well—a continued undulating rise and fall of sound as long as the breath could be maintained. In all my life I never heard anything so plaintively sweet and sad. It seemed to express more than could have been told by words; it was the revelation of a joyless life, of unspeakable yearning, and indefinable regrets.

'Poor child, poor child!' I said involuntarily.

'Poor child, poor child!' she echoed in the same tone of sorrow and commiseration. She seemed to see the significance of my sympathy, to understand that my words were an expression of kindness, for she took up my hand and smoothed her cheek against it carelessly.

I bent down and kissed her head—for she was to me no more than a little child. The

sound of my kiss perplexed her, and looking up in my face, she bade me by a gesture kiss again. I lifted the hand that still clung to mine, and kissed the back of it. She kissed mine, and, repeating the action of her lips once or twice, laughed at the sound she had never heard before.

And now I was curious to see more of her prison, and, taking the candle from the cleft, I lifted it up, shielding it from her eyes with my hand. She caught my arm, and, shrinking to my side, pointed with wild wonder at the flickering shadows caused by the moving light. I placed the candle so that she could see her own shadow on the sands. That delighted her, when she recognised what it was. She spread her arms out, and swayed her lithe body from side to side, and then, singing her song, she kept time to it with a movement of her limbs and body that resembled more the dance of a Japanese girl than any other I know. When she ceased to move she stood looking at her shadow in silent wonder until, comprehension dawning

upon her, she drew me across the cave. At the farther extremity there were some rough steps made in the sand that led to a cavity, where the sea at high tide filtered up through the shingle. There was a clear pool at the present time, and going down to the edge, she bent over and showed me her reflection in the water.

I observed that here there was a faint glimmer of daylight, and as I peered about for the opening that admitted it, she divined my object, and led me away to a point a little beyond, where an enormous slab of chalk sloping up met another that formed a vertical wall, and creeping onwards a few steps, she pointed upwards, and I saw through a cleft high above our heads a narrow strip of blue sky. She clapped her hands with delight as she looked up, for this tiny strip of blue was probably the most beautiful thing in nature she knew.

‘Caw,’ she said, pointing up to let me know it was that way the jackdaw came down to her.

Observing the curiosity with which I examined the cave, Psyche—that is the name I instinctively gave the poor girl—drew me away to show me all the curiosities of her home. Going back to the pool in the hollow, she gave me to understand by gestures and sounds, like the splashing of water, that there she bathed. Then, coming to the litter in the alcove, she threw herself down and closed her eyes. I nodded and snored ; but she did not understand that, though she laughed at the odd sound. She pointed round in grave admiration to the strips of coloured rag with which she had adorned the wall. There was nothing else in that cave that she found worthy of remark except a quantity of old clothing useful in cold weather, as she expressed by drawing her shoulders together and clasping her arms ; but it seemed to me they might give some clue as to the length of time she had been a prisoner, and, turning them over, I found a little frock of gray stuff that had clearly been made by a woman's hand. She clapped her hands and laughed

on my taking this out, and holding it against her side, showed that it came no higher now than her hip. She could not have been more than six or seven when she wore that. That would give her at the outside eleven or twelve years of imprisonment. Well, in that time she might under such conditions easily lose the faculty of speech—reason—anything. The only wonder was that she had continued to exist.

Taking the frock to the alcove, she pointed out some strips of coloured ribbon, and some curious buttons that she had taken from the dress; and little as I knew about such matters, I perceived that no child of the common class would have such trimming on her frock.

Psyche threw aside the dress impatiently, and drew me on quickly, having something better than that to show me. We passed through the opening into the timbered cave, which was far more capacious than the adjoining one. She directed my attention in passing to the table on which the dinner was set,

and also to a receptacle closed with a slab where she kept her food out of the way of 'Caw,' and made her way to that side of the cave where the entrance from the shore was blocked up with the débris from the fallen cliff. The sloping mass spread inward to a considerable distance, the lighter rubble lying on that side nearest the inner cave, and the greater blocks on the other side, where the fracture seemed to have originated. Amongst these blocks, some of which were of gigantic proportions, Psyche began to thread her way. The course was intricate, and to my unaccustomed eyes extremely perilous ; and the difficulty increased as we advanced. In some places it was as much as I could squeeze my body through the openings, in others we passed on hands and knees beneath poised masses that a touch might have brought down upon us. At one point she stopped, and by an expressive gesture let me know that there she had once stood in deadly peril—the expression in her upturned face and crouching figure indicating a mortal

terror. Even with the light to guide me, it was hard to see where the foot might be set with safety ; it was simply marvellous how she could pass with impunity in the dark. Presently she began to scale the blocks, and we mounted until we almost reached the roof of the cave. Seen from this point, the cave, with the timber balks, and the shadows they cast, looked weird and terrible. Right against the roof there was a gap ; through this Psyche slipped sidelong, and disappeared. Coming to the gap, I cried to her in terror ; she answered with a laugh that seemed far away. I followed her as I best could through the narrow gap, and the next instant found myself slipping and rolling down an incline with no power to stop myself. Psyche's laughter assured me that there was no danger, but I was heartily glad when I found myself at the bottom on a bed of soft sand.

My candle had gone out in this rapid descent, but here there was a faint light that filtered its way between the blocks on the seaward side, though no opening was percep-

tible. I had matches in my pocket; I relit the candle, for the light was insufficient to reveal anything distinctly to my eyes. I suppose I looked particularly foolish and frightened, for Psyche continued to laugh until, suddenly seized with apprehension that I had hurt myself, she came quickly to my side and caressed my hand with her cheek, crooning over it gently, like a mother over her child.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I came to look about me, I found that we were standing in a third cavern, though it was so encumbered with broken masses of the fallen cliff that its form and dimensions were at first indistinguishable. One thing was clear; it was in this cave that the explosion had taken place. Many of the fragments were on one face black with powder. Amongst them were scattered in every direction staves of tubs, iron hoops, rusted vessels, scraps of timber, iron bolts, and odds and ends of cloth and woollen garments. My feet struck against a long seaman's boot; it gave an odd rattle under the shock, and when I lifted it up two or three small white bones fell out. They were the bones of a foot! Was Psyche, then, not

the only victim who had been entombed alive?

I dropped the boot with a shudder, and, answering Psyche's call, made my way through the boulders towards that point where she in impatience had preceded me. But at every step I took my foot seemed to be crunching the bones of a dead man, and, indeed, before I had made a couple of paces, I caught sight of a long bone, that I knew must be a human thigh-bone. Presently I came to the spot where Psyche was anxiously waiting to show me the *chef d'œuvre* of her possessions.

She stood before a large square block of chalk, which she had arranged as a kind of altar, grouping upon it, with some idea of symmetry and artistic effect, all that she had found most curious in the cave. Pistols, knives, hatchets, tobacco-boxes, shells, pieces of broken glass, and the like, were massed on each side, but the place of honour between them was occupied by a pyramid of four skulls; in the orbits of the top one, pieces of oyster shell had been placed, and the pearly

surface, reflecting the light from the candle, gave it an appearance that would have been ludicrous if it had not been ghastly.

I glanced in terror at Psyche, to see what effect this grisly show had upon her. She was smiling and swaying her head gracefully from side to side to the low murmuring music of her own voice. Then I perceived that the poor creature must, indeed, have lost her reason, unless her pleasure, in the face of such repulsive mementoes of mortality, was due to utter ignorance of life and death.

For some time she sang her low monotonous hymn—it might have been a rite suggested by some crude religious sentiment. When it was finished, she drew me closer to the altar, and with a sweep of the hand drew my attention to the surface on which her relics were mounted. A fresh surprise confronted me: the block was covered with pieces of gold laid side by side as close as they would go. I took one up, and found it was a louis d'or of 1795. I reckoned there were nearly a hundred of these pieces in a row, and the

block being square, this cover represented a sum of about £10,000, if all the pieces were of the same value.

My astonishment, as I held the coin in my hand, being observed by Psyche, to her great delight, she led me to that end of the cave which was less affected by the explosion, and pointed to another of the gold pieces let into a hole in the wall. On the chalk below, written in rude characters with a piece of charcoal, were these words :

‘To Peter Beamish—French Peter and his lads leaves you this for a present, as specimen of *the lead* in the square chest, which you give us for our sheer out of the French hoy. Let this be a warning to you to play fare next time you go a-wreckin’!’

From this evidence it seemed to me probable that these rascals, after quarrelling over the spoil taken from the French hoy, had separated—French Peter and his party going to the caves, my great-grandfather, with his crew, resting in the house above—and that in a drunken bout, which was pretty sure

to have followed the discovery of their treasure in the lead chest, the gunpowder had been accidentally fired, causing the fall of the cliff and their own annihilation in the very moment of triumph.

I stood lost in wonder over this last discovery, and must confess to a feeling of selfish joy which overcame all better considerations. For I did not question my right as proprietor of these caves, with the land above, to appropriate the fortune found there, and my imagination leapt at the use I might make of it to obtain the hand of Miss Duncan. That prospect intoxicated me, and for the moment it seemed as if the unholy spirit of the dead wreckers, whose bones were before my eyes, had taken possession of me.

From this state of abstraction I was aroused by a gentle touch upon my arm, and turning my regard from the gold that had so fascinated me, I found Psyche looking into my face with troubled solicitude, unable to understand my preoccupation, and why I had forgotten her.

'God forgive me my selfishness,' I said.
'You shall be saved before I think of anything else, poor Psyche!'

'Poor Psyche!' she echoed, in the same tone, with a smile that reflected my pity.

There was no time to lose. Old Peter might at any moment return to Bonport, and hear of his son's accident, and the inquiries that had been made for him. I, at least, must get up to the cottage before he arrived.

The alteration in my manner, as the necessity for immediate action occurred to me, was perceived at once by my watchful companion; and comprehending that for some reason I wished to get back into the other cave quickly, she guided me with swift steps back to the inclined plane by which I had descended so precipitately, and showed me some notched steps which she herself must have cut in the chalk. With surprising agility she ran up the slope; I scrambled laboriously after her, and she once more gave way to a

light laugh at my expense, as she stood at the top waiting for me.

We passed through the gap, and began the descent into the large cave. But now I found the difficulty and danger greater than in climbing up. I made Psyche take my hand, fearing that an inadvertent step might start a boulder from its place and roll it down upon her; and well it was that I took this precaution, for before we were half-way down my weight tilted a block, and the rubble slipping beneath it, set other boulders in motion, and these, starting others in their course, the greater mass moved forward and thundered down in a perfect avalanche to the bottom.

Happily the great block on which I drew Psyche back at the first movement remained firm ; but the crash of falling masses in other parts of the cave, loosened by the concussion, led me to fear that the whole of the cliff above would fall, and I watched with terrible suspense a long fissure that opened directly over our heads, from which a blinding shower of chalk splinters and dust fell upon us. Gradu-

ally the tumult ceased, and the cloud of dust that choked us subsided ; but still at intervals a block fell with a sudden thud upon the ground below. Psyche clung close to me, with her frail arm raised as if to ward off anything that might fall from above. But in this I am certain that the dear little creature was concerned less for her own protection than for mine ; her upturned hand was over my head, not her own, and she kept it raised until the peril was past. Then she looked at me, nodding gravely, and, turning her arm, showed me an old scar in it, from which I concluded that this was not the first nor the worst slip of the cliff in which she had been concerned.

The track she habitually followed was now obliterated, and we had to find a new one ; but though our steps, cautiously as we proceeded, produced two or three fresh slips in the treacherous slope, we got to the bottom without any serious mishap. Rubble and dust lay thick everywhere, and one or two huge fragments had been detached from the side ;

but the timbers had preserved the main body of the large cave, and the roof above looked safe and sound. In the lesser cave no damage whatever had been done ; and there, to her great joy, Psyche found her jackdaw, who had probably hopped off from the other on the first sound of danger.

And now I had to make Psyche understand that we must go up the shaft, and leave the cave. She quickly comprehended that I could go as I had come, but she was utterly unable to grasp the idea that she also was to go. It was more incomprehensible to her, who knew no other place than that in which she lived, than the suggestion of quitting this planet for another would be to me. Indeed, such incomplete and defective explanation as I could make by signs or gestures she was not in a condition to understand or accept, for she no sooner comprehended that I was about to go away than she burst into tears, and, throwing her arms about me, clung to me with the strenuous energy of despair. It seemed to me cruel to leave her there even

for a brief space, after such a terrifying episode as that we had just passed through ; but how heartless must it have seemed to this poor creature, who believed that I was leaving her there for ever ! I waited patiently for the paroxysm of grief to subside, quite at a loss to know how I might reassure her. She grew gradually calmer, as she found I made no further attempt to enter the passage leading to the shaft, and smoothed my hands with her cheek and lips. Suddenly conceiving a stratagem to retain me, she darted into the inner cave and returned with her hands full of the coloured ribbons torn down from the bed-place, and these she put into my hands, looking into my face with an entreating smile.

I took the rubbish and kissed her innocent, sweet brow ; then I drew her towards the passage. She yielded with a long, fluttering sigh, as if accepting an inevitable loss. When we neared the well I sprang on to the plank, and putting my feet in the bucket and the candle between them, I beckoned her to come to me. Then at last, comprehending that

she was to accompany me, she flew to my side. I put my arm around her, and tried to draw the rope ; but it was useless, for, light as she was, our united weight was more than I could lift with one arm encumbered. After one or two trials I gave up the attempt with a shake of my head. She recognised the difficulty, and having given my hand one last caress, she stepped to the ground, and, sinking on her knees, again burst into tears.

I could wait no longer ; to save her I must make my own escape without delay.

I drew myself up hand over hand with Psyche's fading sobs ringing in my ears, until the flame of the candle grew pale in the light from above. Suddenly the light was intercepted, and looking up I saw a face bending over me with a horrid nose and chin and two gleaming eyes under a fur cap that came down to the shaggy white eyebrows—all distinct in the light of the candle at my feet. It was my great-grandfather, Peter Beamish. He waved a jack-knife over my head.

‘ You’re gone down there, are you, you

himp of Satan? Then you're just a-going down there again for good and all!" he shouted; and with that he gave a hack at the rope on which I hung.

CHAPTER VII.

My strength was already nearly exhausted by the exertion of pulling myself up from the bottom of the shaft, the last few feet being made with painful slowness. I had yet six or eight feet to ascend before gaining the level of the mouth, and then, from my inability to leave hold of the rope, I should be entirely at the mercy of the furious old man. A blow with the knife would cut my fingers away and send me hurtling to the bottom ; or he might, holding the rope with one hand, deliberately cut the strands with the other—which he could well do before I raised myself another foot. The only possible way by which I could save my life was to let the cord slip swiftly through my hands, and, by thus preventing him hacking it twice in the

same place, reach the bottom before he achieved his object. It needed but a moment's reflection to arrive at this conclusion, and the next instant the cord was running through my hands as fast as I dared to pay it out. Looking up, I saw old Peter slashing away vigorously, the blade of his knife flashing at each stroke as it was turned by the running rope. Once he reached forward, and, laying hold of it with one hand, sawed at it with the other; but my weight was too much for him, and he had to let go.

A cry of delight and surprise from Psyche showed me I was nearing the bridge, and the next moment I stood upon the plank. Almost simultaneously the rope was cut, and the two lengths swept down. The one way of escape was closed.

I was too agitated at the time to realize the full significance of this incident, or the gravity of my position; indeed, I had reason to congratulate myself on my present escape from immediate destruction, and, in finding

myself once more in the cave safe, I was hardly less light-hearted than Psyche. But I was terribly shaken by fright, and this, with sheer physical fatigue, made my knees tremble under me, and so unnerved my arms that I could scarcely steady my hand to hold a match and strike it. The candle in the bucket had fallen and gone out in the descent, but I had still another in my pocket, and having lit this, I eagerly sought the pitcher of water, for, besides the feeling of faintness, my mouth was gluey with the fever of excitement. To my consternation, I discovered that a fragment, shaken from the well, had fallen on the pitcher and broken it.

Psyche, seeing the trouble in my face, looked about eagerly, and, with a cry of joy, found about a cupful of water in the broken shoulder of the crock, and this she would have had me drink ; but I would not touch it until she had taken her full share, for it occurred to me now that this might be the last sup of water we might ever taste. If old Peter wished to preserve his secret, a sure

and certain means was within his reach. He had but to close the mouth of the well and leave us here to starve. In a week—less than that, perhaps—one or both of us must die, and with us would die the knowledge of his villainy.

I could see no reason for his hesitating to take this course. Certainly no consideration of humanity or kin would stop him ; he had already proved that by his murderous attempt upon my life. This reflection made me marvel why the two old rascals had risked discovery by keeping Psyche alive so many years, her existence costing them a certain outlay, and necessarily continual anxiety, with no obvious return. I could hit upon no clue to this mystery.

I sat upon the block that served Psyche for a table completely engrossed by these thoughts, till she reminded me of her presence by a light touch. The action was just that of your dog, who thrusts his muzzle under your arm when he considers that you have neglected him long enough. She was seated

by my side ; she smiled as I turned to her, and rubbed her cheek against my shoulder.

Her unconcern in the midst of such accidents as had occurred, the absence of any curiosity to know why I was there, or what might happen in the future, shocked and surprised me, until I realized that, in the monotony of such an eventless life as hers, there had been nothing to call for the exercise of apprehension or inquiry, she being altogether the creature of circumstances which were entirely beyond her control.

Greatly touched by her mute appeal for recognition, I then made up my mind to think aloud ; for though she might not understand one word of what I said, the mere sound of my voice, and the necessity of turning to address her, would prevent her feeling excluded from my consideration.

' You see, Psyche,' I began, ' I am down here for good and all, and just as much a prisoner as you are. Heaven knows, you poor unconscious child ! how long we may be

down here, or when our companionship may end. But if it please God that we should die here, then I hope we may die together, and not suffer more than our reasons will bear. I very much fear we are going to have a bitter hard time of it, and shall suffer such pangs of hunger and thirst as it has never yet been our misfortune to bear. I don't think we may count on any mercy from those two wicked old rascals above, and our only hope lies in our own efforts enabling us to escape from these terrible caverns. And a small hope that is; for as to getting out the way we came in, that's out of the question. If we do escape, it will be by the sea front; but how we are to do it I don't know. There must be thirty or forty feet of chalk to cut our way through, even if we chance to hit upon the best place to work at, and say that we make as much as a foot a day, there's thirty or forty days' work. But we've got no food, Psyche, and under starvation we shall get weaker and weaker each day; and I reckon that before a week's out we shall

have neither strength nor courage to cut a single inch in the day. Still, it's no good despairing before we begin, and if we are to do anything we must look on the best side of things and go about our work hopefully ; so now, first of all, let us see what resources we have got.'

I rose to my feet, and so did she with alacrity, and as I looked at the remnants of her dinner on the table, she took up the piece of bread left by the jackdaw and offered it to me. I took it to the hole where she kept her food. There was the slice of pork I had sent down, and a few dry crusts.

'Caw,' she explained, pointing to them.

'No, we can't let Caw have them,' said I, shaking my head ; 'they are for Psyche and me,' touching her and myself.

She seemed to understand, for when I put the morsel of bread she had given me into the hole, she blocked it up firmly with the stone, laughing, and then turned to me for approval. I nodded and patted her shoulder, on which she rubbed her hands gleefully,

and then gave the stone another push for security.

‘And now, Psyche, we will look about and see where we have the best chance of escape—if any chance there be.’

At this moment a noise, echoing down the shaft, struck our ears. I took Psyche’s hand, and we went through the tunnel. When I looked up I found that the light was no longer visible, the cover had been replaced, and the hammering sound we heard told plainly enough that old Peter was making good the part I had split.

‘Bom, bom, bom!’ said Psyche, laughing.

‘It’s a happy thing for you, my poor little comrade! that you don’t know what that sound means,’ said I. ‘Those blows might tell you plain enough that he’s made up his mind what our fate shall be. Come away. It’s like hearing the nails being driven into our own coffin.’

When we got back into the cave I blew out the light.

‘Mustn’t begin by being careless, Psyche.

It won't do to burn candle. We may be glad to eat it before long.'

I groped about in the dark for the store-hole; but when I explained what I wanted by saying 'Caw,' Psyche at once perceived my object, and led me to the place.

'I shall have to get used to this darkness,' said I; 'at present I can distinguish nothing. You must be my eyes.'

I was silenced for a minute or so by a feeling of utter helplessness in the obscurity. Psyche filled up the interval with some little noises of her own, prompted, doubtless, by the same motive that had led me to speak whatever came into my mind.

'Yes, that's very true, Psyche,' said I, when she stopped; 'but where the dickens are we? Shall I ever be able to see through this darkness? Heaven help us! what are we to do? How can I settle where to begin and what to do? There's the hatchet in the bucket—might as well hack away at something directly as stand here idle. But how can I find the way to the tunnel, or make

you understand that I want to go there ?
Wait a bit—bom, bom, bom ! Psyche—do
you understand me ?—bom, bom, bom !'

She replied in a cheerful tone, and led me carefully along until I felt the brickwork of the passage ; advancing with still greater care, I reached the shaft and got the hatchet and knife out of the bucket, and I thought it as well to take the bucket and ropes as well, in case I might find use for them. Psyche helped me to haul the ropes along, and, to amuse her, I sang a chant that I have heard at the capstan as the sailors heave up the anchor :

When all Jack's money is gone and spent,
And none's to be borrowed and none's to be lent,
Then says the landlord with a frown,
'Get up, you, Jack, let John sit down,
For I see you're out'ard bound, heave oh !
I see you're out'ard bound.'

Psyche was in ecstasies over this, and to hear us singing and laughing as we hauled the rope along, one would have thought we had not a care in the world.

'Well, now where are we, and what are we to do next?' I asked, as Psyche came to a standstill. 'Oh, my child, for God's sake, don't laugh! I can't stand it.' The appeal came from my heart involuntarily, for our mirth in the midst of this terrible obscurity overcame me like the singing of a bird in the presence of death.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘PSYCHE, it’s not a bit of good thinking about working in this cave,’ said I, when I had brought myself into a practical state of mind again. ‘The first blow might bring another avalanche down on us, and one’s enough in a day. It’s still less a bit of good making any attempt in French Peter’s cave, for, to begin with, I don’t care to risk my neck in scaling the slope without a light, and our candle’s too precious to burn; and secondly, if we get in there without another cataclysm those blocks would be found more treacherous to work on than these before us (if they *are* before us—a fact which I cannot decide at present). Very well, then, if we cannot attempt anything in these two caves, there remains only your bedchamber to go

at. That is certainly the safest of the three, and I think we can chop away at the cliff there till we can't chop any longer, with no fear of dying by anything worse than starvation. Now, how can I tell you that I want to be led into the little cave, Psyche? Do you know what this means? "Splash, splash, dabble, dabble, splash!" By George, you're a better thought-reader than ever I've known,' I added, as she began to lead me along, with a purl of satisfaction in recognising my wish.

I had not been in this cave before without a candle, and it surprised me now to find how much lighter it was than I expected. I could make out the form of Psyche, and when we came immediately below the strip of blue I could well distinguish her features, although the opening through which the light came was a mere crack, not wide enough in any part, as it appeared to me, for the jackdaw to squeeze his body through. The tide had ebbed, and there was no longer a pool in the cavity, but Psyche, running

down to the bottom and scooping away a few handfuls of sand, showed me that there was still water not far below the surface. I was sorry to see this, for it had occurred to me on seeing the water gone that we might be able to tunnel under the rock instead of through it, and so make our escape by the shore. This would, of course, be out of the question if the bottom of the fallen mass were lower than the level of the sea. Still, there was hope that the tide had not yet reached its lowest.

I looked up to see if it might be practicable to get to the opening, and by enlarging it to escape thence. But the mouth of this cave was closed, not by a mass of rubble and scattered blocks as in the others, but by a clean-cut mass, sloping outward below, and presenting no irregularities that would facilitate climbing. The walls of the cave, against which it had ground its way in falling, arched over, and were even more impracticable. The opening was, as I reckoned, fifty feet over our heads, we stand-

ing some twelve feet or so from the nearest wall.

'If that great heap of rubbish in the next cave were only piled up here, Psyche!' said I, finding that I had lapsed into silence.

She answered by rubbing her cheek against my shoulder, and murmuring some unintelligible sounds.

'But it isn't, and we have to do without it somehow. We might drag it in little by little, to be sure, but it would take us months to make a pile that would reach to that opening, and I'm afraid we have not got months to live. If we dared to pull down one of the timbers that shore up the roof in the big cave, with a view to notching it for a ladder, I'm not sure that we could drag it in here; but I am sure that we could never set it upon end. So that's no good, is it? No, we must either cut through the chalk or burrow under it. Now supposing we tap it all the way along, and see if any one part sounds less solid than the other.'

We went to the extreme end on one side,

and with the back of the hatchet I knocked upon the face of the chalk till we reached the other end. It amused Psyche, but it disheartened me, for I could make out no difference in the sound anywhere.

‘It doesn’t matter where we begin, Psyche. We shall just make a mark to show some future discoverer where we tried to escape before we lay down to die, and that’s all.’

‘That’s all,’ she said, catching the words and echoing my mournful tone.

‘Well, here goes for a beginning,’ said I, in desperation; and disengaging her hands from my own, I gave a cut at the chalk with my axe. Chipping first of all a square about two feet each way, which I considered sufficiently large for us to wriggle through if ever we got the chance, I worked on steadily till I was tired out. Psyche stood by looking on in silence while I was engaged; but the moment I laid down the axe she took it up and carried on the work; nor would she give up the axe until her strength failed.

'Well done, Psyche! you are a brave little helpmate,' said I; but when I took the axe from her hand I felt that she was trembling with exhaustion, and her arms and face were wet with perspiration. I wiped her brow gently with my handkerchief, and made her sit down by my side, with words of sympathy and admiration that sprang from my heart. As for her, I believe that this was the happiest hour of her life, for she cooed with delight as she nestled close to my side.

We had been working best part of an hour, I imagine, and the sky overhead was getting dark, from which I concluded it must be about seven o'clock, it being now the end of March.

'We have done enough for to-day, Psyche,' said I, greatly elated by our progress, 'and you have done admirably—quite as much as I have, if not more; for though your strokes are feebler, you can see what you are at. I couldn't, and half of my labour was wasted in useless blows. I dare say we've knocked the hole six inches deep between us. That's

good. Well begun is half done, it's said, I'm afraid that's not quite true in our case. However, we won't question a hopeful proverb. One thing I perceive now that I might have foreseen at first. We haven't got it large enough by two-thirds. We may have fifty feet of the stuff to work through, and we must therefore make the hole big enough to stand upright and work in. That's discouraging, but we won't think of it, will we ?

She attempted to respond, but her voice had lost its clear sweetness, and was husky and thick. My own voice rasped my throat ; but the knowledge that she was already suffering from thirst was harder to bear than my own craving, and the anticipation of what she must yet suffer before the end came maddened me.

'We *must* have water,' I cried in desperation ; 'what can I do ?'

She nestled yet closer to my arm, as if to comfort me in my evident distress.

Suddenly I remembered the water at the

bottom of the well, and the bucket and rope I had in the next cave. I sprang to my feet, and raised my little comrade. And then, striking a match, I hurried into the great cave and seized the bucket. The match went out, but I lit another, feeling that we might be prodigal at such a time. We went to the edge of the well, and I drew up a bucketful of water and put it to my lips; it was brackish, foetid, and undrinkable. I struck my head with a groan, and I would not let Psyche touch it again, eager as she looked at the sight of it. Then I bethought me that if we had any kind of a filter it might be rendered sweet and wholesome.

'Come along, little one,' I said, 'we'll see what we can do;' and, the light being out, I left her to guide me back.

But now, though it seemed to me no darker than it had been in the earlier part of the day, there was a difference, and Psyche, who could not see in absolute darkness, had to feel her way back. I got out our precious candle and lit it, and choosing a suitable

lump of chalk, I hollowed it out quickly with the axe. Setting it firmly between three stones I filled it with water from the bucket, and set that piece of the crock in which we had found water underneath to catch the drops as they filtered through. Then I blew out the light, knowing that we must wait some time for any result. After waiting as I guessed best part of an hour, I lit a match ; the water was gone from the hollow, but not a drop had fallen into the crock, the chalk having absorbed all. When I looked at Psyche she smiled, and, putting her finger to her throat, signified that she was no longer thirsty ; my own thirst had subsided somewhat, for it was the heat of our exertions and the dust from the chalk that had made us so dry, and fearing that after all the water might not be drinkable, I thought it better that we should now lie down and try to sleep, with a view to rising early to begin work again.

I relit the candle, and, taking Psyche into the next cave, pointed to her alcove, and bade

her lie down. At the same time, as she had a great thickness of the hay and straw sent down from time to time for her use, I took an armful for my own use, and bade her good-night.

She seemed puzzled and disappointed for a minute at the separation which she saw I intended, but when I spoke gravely and pointed again to the alcove, she accepted my bidding, and having given my hand one last caress with her cheek, ran to the alcove and threw herself down. I made myself comfortable in the sand in the next cave, and, having refilled the hollowed chalk to the brim, blew out the light. But it was a long while before I could go to sleep for thinking over the means of escape, and trying to devise some better expedient than the laborious one of cutting through an unknown quantity of chalk; added to the disquietude of my mind, my thirst again began to grow intolerable, and it must have been nearly daybreak when I at last fell asleep.

It was broad daylight when I awoke, as I

knew by the faint glimmer in the small cave, which revealed the outline of the opening.

‘There’s no need to wake the poor child,’ thought I, as my mind turned to Psyche. So I lay still, trying to moisten my parched throat by swallowing, and accustoming my eyes to the darkness. I found that the obscurity was less impenetrable to my eyes than I had found it the day before, and that pleased me. But naturally my first thought was of the water I had set to filter; and I should certainly have sprung up to examine the crock but for the awful dread of finding the water impure. While I lay there, fearing to put this question to the touch, I became conscious of something warm, and, turning my eyes, now accustomed to the semi-light diffused through the cave, I perceived Psyche coiled up beside my litter, her face against my head. My heart melted with this testimony of affection—the more because it showed such ignorance of civilization, and was so purely instinctive.

She was not asleep, and at the slight

movement of my head she rose on her knees, and, looking down into my open eyes, sang her little elfish song over me.

It was so sweet, and weird, and unnatural that a sudden terror seized me, as I imagined it might be the first sign of that madness that comes with insufferable thirst.

I sprang up, and, striking a light, held the match with trembling fingers to the crock. It was full to overflowing, and the water was bright and transparent. I put my lips to the edge, and finding it sweet and good, lifted it with great joy to my dear little friend's mouth; she drank it eagerly, and yet there was enough left to quench my burning thirst.

CHAPTER IX.

Now that we had water in abundance, I became reckless, and dividing our little store of hard crusts, we ate all at one meal, leaving nothing eatable in the store-hole—except the end of a candle. Then having set more water in the filter, we went into the small cave and continued the work we had begun the night before, enlarging the cutting to three feet in width and six feet in height. In this occupation we hacked on without intermission, turn and turn, until mid-day, and then after the last bout, feeling sick and faint for want of proper food, I would not let Psyche take the axe from my hand, though the willing girl was on her feet and eager to begin the moment I gave over.

‘No, Psyche,’ said I; ‘we must take our

dinner-hour the same as other workmen, albeit we have nothing to eat.'

We emptied the crock of sweet water, and Psyche seemed quite contented and happy. We sat down side by side, and I gave my companion a lesson in speech, naming all the things around us, and making her repeat them after me, and then point them out, when I named them again; and surely no master ever had a more quick and pleasant pupil. In this way we beguiled an hour away, and feeling better for the rest, I returned to the work, but not so hopefully as in the early morning, for certain symptoms already warned me that without food we should be almost as badly off as without water, and that our strength could not hold out against starvation long enough for us to get through even ten feet of the cliff, and fifty feet must, as I reckoned, be the average thickness of the block. It was astonishing to me how quickly our strength gave out now, and how feeble our strokes became. Before we had been working an hour my limbs

shook after a few blows, and the sweat dropped from my face as if I had gone through a labour of Hercules ; as for poor Psyche, she took the axe now in both hands, and in two or three minutes was forced to yield it up with a little moan of despair. But while I worked she would bear her share of the fatigue, and so when we had struggled on for barely two hours more, I threw down the axe with despair in my heart, and led her away.

‘ It is no good, Psyche, not a bit of good,’ said I ; ‘ we haven’t cut half a foot deep in the cursed rock. It’s useless killing ourselves with fatigue for nothing at all. It must seem a cruel sport to you, poor child ! who have no idea what all this hard work is for. You think it pleases me to see you toil, perhaps ; or maybe you think I am putting your endurance and patience to this cruel test. Why, you poor little soul ! your hands are full of blisters. You may well wince when I touch them ; and now you are smiling and cooing as if it were a pleasure to

suffer by me. I can understand it, though. I know how I should feel towards any living thing in human form that came to me in a solitude such as this. I'm the only companion you have ever known in this secret life of yours—that's why you cling so to me, isn't it ?'

As I ceased to speak she nestled closer beside me on the rock where we sat, and murmured some words that seemed to entreat me to talk on.

' You want more, Psyche, more ?'

' More, more,' she echoed. And so I talked on and on, just whatever came uppermost in my thoughts, until her fingers relaxed on my arm and her head dropped upon my shoulder. I passed my fingers gently over her face and found that her eyes were closed. There was a tear on her cheek—a tear of happiness, perhaps, with which she had fallen asleep.

The litter was within my reach, and after holding her silently in my arms until I was assured that her sleep was profound, I

moved her slowly and tenderly down on to it, disposing her in a comfortable position. She only opened her eyes once, and then it was to murmur again, ‘More, more !’

The excitement of the previous day may have kept her awake through the night ; perhaps all the time that I slept she was watching over me, wondering at the strange thing that had come into her world.

I sat beside her for some time, and then, getting up, I felt along the walls in both caves to see if there were any lichen or growth that would serve us for food, for a ghastly dread now oppressed me that Psyche would die before long, and I should be left with that poor dead little creature to go mad. Food I must get for her, but where ? I found nothing on the rocks. I looked about for the jackdaw, but the prudent bird had flown through the gap the evening before, and had not thought fit to return.

I hardly know how I got through the rest of the day. Psyche slept calmly, and while

there was yet a faint light in the small cave I myself fell asleep, sick with hunger and with despair.

My first thought when I awoke on the third day was of Psyche. Was she still alive? I asked myself. Creeping to where she lay, I bent over her, holding my breath in dreadful suspense, praying with my very soul that I might hear her respiration. She lifted her arms and clasped her hands about my neck. With a cry of gratitude and joy, I raised her to her feet.

The mad hope of escape seized me once more, and rushing into the little cave, I seized the axe and attacked the cliff. Psyche stood by, waiting to take her turn, but I kept on till my strength was utterly exhausted. By that time the reaction had come, and once again flinging the axe from me, I swore that I would play this fool's game no more, and that come what might neither Psyche nor I should cut another stroke in this maddening endeavour.

At that very moment Psyche seized my

arm, and after standing silent a moment, burst into joyous laughter and flew from my side. I followed her as quickly as I could, wondering what fantasy possessed her, until, coming into the large cave, her action was explained. From the direction of the well came that signal which my grandfather had told me to make. Someone was whistling as if to a dog. When I reached the edge of the shaft Psyche was singing her Æolian song, and the light from above fell on her pale, upturned face. I looked up and descried a head bending over.

‘ Hold on that catawauling !’ shouted the voice from above, which I recognised at once as old Peter’s.

I touched Psyche’s arm, and she ceased to sing.

‘ Barnard, you cussed Barnard !’ roared Peter.

‘ Well,’ I answered.

‘ You blamed warment, you’re begun to kick up that hammerin’ row down there, are you ?’

‘What’s that to you?’ I replied.

‘Why, it’s nothin’ to me, come to that. But Ben’s here—your grandfather—and he can’t go to sleep, according to the doctor’s orders, while you’re a kickin’ up that racket.’

Now this seemed to me as artless a reason as my grandfather himself might have offered—coming from the lips of a man who all his life had observed a Spartan indifference to the sufferings of others. However, it was sufficient to know that the noise was objectionable, and therefore a possible means of obtaining relief.

‘You’re got to stop it; do you understand that there?’ he shouted, his wicked old voice breaking from a hoarse bass to a squeaking treble. ‘You’re got to stop it.’

‘I shall make just as much noise as I please, and go on just as long as I choose,’ I replied.

‘No, you won’t, blame you! About three days’ starvation would do you. Half a dozen would do me, so I know. In three days you’d be quiet enough. But I ain’t a-goin’ to

have my boy Ben tormented on his bed o' sickness, I ain't. If it warn't for leaving of him all alone I'd come down and knock your head off; do you understand that there? I'm no more afeard of you than I am of a blow-fly on a bunch o' lights. But to please my boy Ben, and just for the sake of peace and quietness, I'm going to send you down a loaf of bread (pause), and mebbe a lump o' pork (pause), an' preaps a tater or two. But it's all perwising you take your dyin' oath you won't kick up no more racket, you understand that there!'

As I had resolved not to work upon the cliff again, it was no great hardship to agree to these terms—though I did so without appearing to jump at his offer, and rather as if to oblige my grandfather than myself. In fact, we wasted some minutes in mutual bullying before he withdrew, during which time I trembled with fear lest he should go from his offer. When he came again into sight he had a basket in his hand.

'Here's wittles a-comin' down, and they'll

come down pretty regular if you behave yourself as a grandson oughter; but mark my words, if there's any more hammerin' I shall not only stop the wittles, but I'll come down hand over hand, and knock yower blamed head off your blamed shoulder—so you understand that there !

We waited to hear no more when the basket reached us, but, seizing the contents, ran back to the great cave, and there we devoured the food with such laughing gladness and fervent gratitude as very rarely attends the richest of repasts. And to crown Psyche's delight, whilst there was still bread and meat to spare, we were hailed by a lusty 'caw,' and the jackdaw fluttered down in the very midst of our good things. Sagacious bird !

CHAPTER X.

THOUGH I had given my promise to cease cutting at the cliff, and intended to keep it, I was by no means deterred from thinking of escape. It would have needed more than the pangs of hunger to make me accept perpetual imprisonment. And now that we might depend with tolerable certainty on receiving a daily supply of food, the possibility of escape was greater than before. We could afford to spend months in the effort. My thoughts turned again to burrowing under the rock.

‘Come along, Psyche; let us go back to the place and see what we can make of it,’ said I, when we had put away in our store-hole all that was left of the food.

She ran at once and fetched the axe, and

seemed rather sorry than glad when I signified that we were not going to use it again.

'But there will be plenty of work for you by-and-by, you helpful little friend,' said I. 'Only what we have to settle now is which way we are to employ ourselves to the best advantage, and not rush into a hopeless task, as we did in our despair. Just stand quietly by my side while I think it out. And as it seems to me that I think more clearly when I talk aloud, I'll tell you just what comes up in my mind, as if you understood every word, you attentive, wise-looking little soul! Now, there's that confounded mass of fallen cliff that stands between us and freedom, and there's the sand and shingle on which it rests. Where's the best place to scoop out a tunnel and creep under the cliff? At first sight it would seem that Nature has done a good deal for us in making a great cavity down there for us to start from. But I now begin to think that the idea is very misleading. I think that must be the most

difficult part to begin upon, just because there is a cavity there. For if the mass did not descend a great way there, and present a great obstacle, it would have been filled up before now by the sand silting up every time the water rises. Where the sand is highest, Psyche, there the fallen cliff must have opposed the least resistance to the inwash of the tide. Now there's a little water at the bottom there; we'll scoop it out, and then see on which side the water flows in most quickly. Run and fetch me the crock, Psyche—crock.'

She looked at me an instant, and then, remembering the word I had taught her, ran off swiftly, and returned with the crock, hugely delighted.

I descended into the hollow and baled out the water, and watched what followed keenly.

'There,' said I in triumph, 'look at the little thread of water glistening in the light! That comes from the right hand, and there,

exactly as it should be, the shingle and sand are highest.'

Acting upon this theory, I found the highest point of ground, and, digging down with the axe against the face of the fallen cliff, made a beginning of this long job. As soon as Psyche perceived what I was about, she fell on her knees, and dug out the loose sand, using her hands for a tool.

'Wait a bit, little one,' said I. 'You have blisters on your hands; come with me, and let us see if we can't find something in the shape of gloves to cover them.'

Amongst the things she had hung about her alcove were some pairs of thick knitted stockings, for which she had found no use. I made her slip her arms into a pair, and the feet, covering her hands, served as a very good protection to them. They excited her mirth immensely, and though they seemed at first to tickle her arms and produce discomfort, she was well content to wear them when I signified my ap-

proval of their use—indeed, there was no incident in her life at this time which did not in some way minister to her happiness.

Digging in the sand was far less laborious than cutting a cliff, and we worked on without feeling fatigue until I decided that we should take our dinner-hour. By that time we were standing in a hole as high as my armpits, but we had not yet reached water, though the tide had risen its highest, as one could see by the pool in the hollow. I was very well satisfied, however, with the progress we had made, and, standing on the edge, when I nodded approvingly to Psyche, she looked down and nodded approvingly to me.

After our meal we set to work again, and kept on till the light faded, only pausing for half an hour in the afternoon to rest and refresh ourselves with some bread and water. How we relished this simple fare no one can imagine who has not suffered privation, and done a long spell of good hard work.

We had made less progress in the

afternoon than in the morning, for not only was the sand and shingle more compact and difficult to work as we got lower, but the labour of throwing it up out of the pit was far greater; and for that reason I gave Psyche the axe to loosen the ground, while I scooped it up with a piece of the broken crock and shot it out. However, we had every reason to be content with our day's work, for we had sunk the pit to a depth of seven feet, and the tide rising again at the time we struck work showed that we had come to the level of high water, if not below it.

As we had done so well this day I thought we might afford to have a little light with our supper — Psyche being as unable as myself to see in total darkness — so I got out the candle, which even our hunger had spared, and struck a match. Although the light was still trying to Psyche's eyes, she was greatly interested in the means of producing it; and when I made her strike a match she gave a long-

drawn exclamation of wonder at seeing the light burst forth, and continued to hold it at arm's length until the flame approached her fingers, when she dropped it with a cry of terror; for heat was as much a new experience to her as light. But the crowning surprise came when (taking advantage of the light) I drew out my watch, which had run down, wound it up, and set it to what I thought might be the hour. She bent over it in mute astonishment, pointing to the second hand as it travelled round, and repeating softly the sound it made. I think she looked upon it as a living thing, a kind of 'caw,' for she murmured that word dubiously among the strange musical sounds she made when I ceased to talk to her, and when I put it in her hand she smoothed it with her cheek, and would by no means allow it to lie on its face, though the shining back drew forth a coo of admiration. I took it to her alcove and put it below the blanket that served for her pillow, and she was content to lie down at once and keep

it company, fancying, I imagine, that by my keeping it in my pocket it was a delicate sort of creature, that must be kept warm and comfortable. I heard her singing to it in a low tone for some time afterwards as I sat in the dark, pondering over the strange things that had happened to me.

I was awoke in the morning by the whistling of old Peter down the shaft.

'Send up the pitcher, you little varmint!' he called as I took the things from the basket, 'and the bucket likewise, if you want any water!'

'The bucket is down below, and the pitcher's broken,' I answered.

With a profusion of curses he drew up the cord, lowered a fresh pitcher of water, pulled up the cord once more, and slammed the cover down, without waiting to hear the song of thanks which Psyche, who had quickly followed me, offered. She put the watch with tenderest care into my hands. I left her to set out our breakfast, which she instinctively saw was her business rather

than mine, and went to have a peep at the blue sky. I found the water high in the hollow, and after a refreshing dip I peered down into our pit to see if it was as we had left it. I saw that the rise and fall of the water had caused a slip in the sand, and above two feet of our work would have to be done over again. This was no more than I had expected, but I perceived that we must devise some means of shoring up the sides before we could make more progress. Returning to the large cave, I bade Psyche go and take her dip—an instruction which she readily understood and accepted—while I sat down to consider the subject of shoring up the pit; but somehow I could hit on no device until Psyche, having taken her bath, came back and sat down by my side, and I told her what was on my mind, in the hope that some idea would come to me. For I began to see that this method of thinking aloud, besides being agreeable to my companion, brought a clearer perception of things than silent meditation.

'You see, Psyche,' said I, breaking the loaf in half and giving her one portion, 'we may have to go a good way further down yet, and all the time we are working below the level of high water we shall be subject to continual washing down and washing in of sand and rubbish. If it were shored, the water coming in would be an advantage, for it would loosen the stuff, and we could pull it up in the bucket. (And that reminds me that we shall have to time our eating and drinking, and our sleeping as well, maybe, to take advantage of the hours when the water is low enough to allow of our working.) The only way I can think of is to wall it round below the water level with chunks of chalk. The job will be to bring them in from the great heap out there—and a long job too, carrying them in one at a time. If we only had a barrel that we could fill and roll along now! Barrels there are enough in French Peter's cave—I saw some intact, as if they were still full of spirits. And there's just about enough candle to last us through. I

wonder if we might venture in there. It's worth trying—what do you think, my quiet, attentive little friend ?

What she did think I cannot tell ; but taking her encouraging manner for approval of my idea, I determined to make the attempt. That morning we climbed the great slope, and happily with such unexpected escape from accident that I have nothing to tell of our passing into French Peter's cave this second time, except that we found the slip had considerably opened the gap at the top, and that my descent to the bottom of the inner side was less ignominious and terrifying than before. I saw no material change in this cave.

A couple of barrels, sheltered by an angle of rock, had escaped destruction. I knocked in the heads and found them full of spirit, which I ruthlessly emptied away, thanking God that I had not thought of them when thirst might have tempted me to seek a mad forgetfulness in their contents. The empty tubs we got up the slope, and rolled down

into the inner cave, having first filled them with old staves, which might serve us in the future for a light ; and also we took a crow-bar and another axe from Psyche's altar. The gold lay there in mockery of the power of wealth : I would have given as much of it as a man could take in return for an iron shovel.

And now, having got all that we wanted for our present use, we returned to the big cave—again passing over the treacherous slope without accident—and carried our treasures to the edge of the pit.

The water had now ebbed, and in order to see better what the face of the cliff looked like at the bottom I chopped up a couple of staves into thin strips, and, having built them up in a cone on the edge, I set fire to them. And this led to an unanticipated result which I hasten to tell.

The fire had not been burning ten minutes when we heard old Peter whistling furiously down the shaft.

‘ What are you at now, you young plagues ? ’

he called, when I answered his whistle from the bottom of the shaft. ‘Ain’t ye got no feelin’ of respec’ for the sick that you go a choking your poor grandfather with this here smother of smoke? Do you want me to come down and knock your heads off? You’re got to put that there fire out at once, do you understand that there?’

‘We must have light,’ I answered.

‘Must have light, blame ye! Do you think we’re rollin’ in riches that we can afford to feed the both on you and keep you in lights as well? Put out that there fire. Your grandfather’s a-chokin’! don’t you hear him?’

‘I’ll put out the fire when you send me down candles.’

He went away and returned with amazing celerity.

‘There’s candles for a week, and you shall have more when they’re gone, pervising you put out that fire at once, and don’t light it no more. It’s all for my poor Ben’s sake, mind. I’d never give you food nor candles nor

nothin' else, if I had my way. I'm doin' of it to please my boy, mind that.'

But I knew better, and now saw through this pretended paternal sympathy. The smoke was not ascending the well, but streaming up through the gap in the cave over the pit, and he feared that it would attract the attention of the coastguard. That also was why the noise we made in cutting the cliff had brought him to reason.

CHAPTER XI.

‘It’s as clear, my little friend, as the blessed blue sky up there,’ said I to Psyche. ‘These old rascals have given us food to cease hammering, and candles to put out the fire, for fear we should succeed in betraying our imprisonment to the coastguard, who passes, probably, once or twice a day along the cliff. It never occurred to me that we might attract attention leading to investigation by those means; but now that it is obvious, the question arises whether, instead of going on with our tunnel, which we cannot hope to complete without weeks and weeks of patient toil, it would not be better to devote all our energies in this new direction, shouting, hammering, sending up a cloud of smoke, and doing anything else that might excite the

curiosity of anybody passing near. We might even make a rod long enough to thrust through the hole up there by splitting the staves, and binding them together ; and tying my handkerchief to the end, we might agitate it from morning till night, in addition to the means we already have. The notion is tempting ; what are the arguments against it ? I'm not more afraid of old Peter than he is of me—perhaps less ; so I don't think we need consider his promise to knock our heads off as a serious danger. But he might square the coastguard, and he might find means of rolling rubbish down to choke up the hole above us, and he certainly would stop the supply of food. We know what that means. If we did not make ourselves heard in a few days it would be all up with any chance of escape, so that, on the whole, I doubt if an openly offensive policy is wise.'

Psyche, listening with the greatest attention, shook her head dubiously, seeing me do so.

‘Besides,’ I continued, ‘there is this to consider. If an investigation should be made, these two old reprobates would cut and run, and we should never see them again. At first sight that does not look like a misfortune. But there’s your future welfare to consider, my poor Psyche, and that depends very much upon bringing the wretches to justice who have blighted your youth. Revenge can do us no good, but we must wring out the secret of your captivity; we must find out your family, and restore you to those from whom you were taken, that you may have friends to love and to take care of you when we two part.’

‘When we two part,’ she echoed blankly, and yet in a tone so full of mournful regret that I could almost believe she understood the meaning of my words.

The sound alone was language to her.

‘Then we’ll make up our minds to take the slow and safe course, and go pegging away at this hole steadily till we burrow through to freedom. Gloves, Psyche.’

That word being one that was quite understandable, she dashed off with delight, and returned with the stockings on her arms, ready for anything I might bid her do. Dropping down into the pit, I lit a candle, and, scraping the sand away, examined the face of the cliff. Near the bottom I discovered an angular fracture. With the crow-bar we had brought away from French Peter's cave I succeeded in wrenching out a large block of chalk, when, to my great delight, I found that there was nothing below but sand and shingle, showing that we had come to the bottom of the fallen cliff.

The disengaged block I prised into that portion of the pit which had fallen in through the action of the water, as a beginning to the wall with which we had to surround the lower part, and then, as there was still water at the bottom, I fetched the bucket from the well, and getting down again into the pit, filled it with the loose sand and pushed it up, while Psyche hauled from the top, where she emptied it. Working down lower and lower,

the vertical line that marked the bottom of the chalk became more and more distinct as the sand dropped away from its base. In a couple of hours I had reached a depth that seemed sufficient to permit of opening the lateral boring ; but, as it was necessary to secure the sides of the pit from falling in with the next rising tide, we spent the rest of the morning in shoring it round with the barrel-staves (for which we had now no other use), kept in place by lumps of chalk, which we rolled in from the great cave in the empty tubs. This was hard work, and we had to lose no time, for fear the water should rise before the job was done ; but, happily, we got the sides fairly well protected before the tide rose, so that I think there was not above a dozen bucketfuls of sand to take away when it fell again, and best part of that had washed in from under the cliff in the direction our boring was to take, which was so much to our advantage.

I had looked at my watch when the water disappeared from the bottom of the pit, and

again when it rose, and found that the interval between was a little over four hours, so that we could reckon on having eight hours' uninterrupted work in the boring out of the twenty-four, which left us sixteen for clearing away the sand thrown up from the pit, for any other incidental work, and for rest. And in this order we worked thenceforth, never failing to take advantage of low water, only that, as the days went on, we found it necessary to change our hours of rest, sometimes sleeping in the day to take advantage of the ebb that came in the night. But this was of little consequence to us, for, as we burrowed further and further under the cliff, we worked constantly by candle-light, and could make night in the cave at any moment by simply blowing out the light.

It must not be imagined that we had no difficulties or hardships to contend with. We had to proceed like moles, scraping the wet stuff away before us, and pushing it back until the bucket in our rear was full,

when it had to be dragged out into the shaft and shot up to the surface. The mere labour of dragging the stuff out and returning for more occupied much time, and increased materially as we got further from the pit. At one point we found our progress completely stopped by a rock embedded in the sand, and after attempting for three days to work it out by means of the crowbar, we were forced to turn aside and burrow round it. The rising tide was a continual source of trouble and anxiety, for, besides washing in the sides of our tunnel, it sapped the shoring of the pit, which gave way twice, despite our watchfulness, doing mischief that took us, on each occasion, a week to repair. In addition to this, we were in continual dread of being blocked in by the fall of the ragged and unequal mass above us.

I shall never forget our horror one night—or *my* horror, rather (for Psyche seemed to know no fear when with me)—on feeling a difficulty in breathing, and observing our

candle burn low. On backing along the tunnel I discovered that the thing I dreaded had come to pass: a mass of sand and shingle had fallen in and completely blocked our retreat. The more we thrust with our feet the more compact the obstacle became. The water was rising in front of us, and it seemed inevitable that we should be drowned there like rats in a drain. Every moment the difficulty of breathing became greater, and an awful singing in the head warned me that we were being suffocated. It was the terrible sensation we may all have experienced in dreaming of being buried alive. The water advanced steadily, but we still stuck in the same place. We lay in water up to the neck, only keeping our mouths free by raising our heads against the top of the tunnel. To make the horror greater, our light went out. I clasped Psyche's hand, thinking it was all over, and resigned myself as well as I could to the death that seemed close at hand. But the water that threatened to drown us saved us, by loosening the sand behind, and,

suddenly, to our inexpressible relief, we breathed freely as the sand melted away before the pressure of our feet. When we got out into the cave I fell upon my knees instinctively, and knelt there sick and trembling with emotion, while Psyche raised her little hymn of gratitude above me.

This terrible accident made me decide that night that we would run the awful risk no more, but the next morning hope overcame my fears, and I went again into the tunnel, leaving Psyche, however, in the cave to do work that I reckoned would occupy her till I came out. Before I had been there an hour she came to my side with a joyful cry, having done in that time all that I had set her to do, and done it well. I let her stay. ‘I do not think you could live alone now, Psyche,’ said I; ‘and so, if I am to perish in here, you may as well die with me.’

But we were not again caught in this way, and despite all the difficulties we had to overcome—of which I have instanced only a few—at the end of two months from the time we

first began our tunnel, we had penetrated under the cliff a distance not less than forty feet from the pit ; and this I reckoned might fairly be considered about half the distance we had to go.

CHAPTER XII.

WE received our supply of food and candles with tolerable regularity from above. When there was any sign of neglect or forgetfulness on the part of old Peter, a rap on the cliff with the hatchet brought him at once to the mouth of the well with a request to know what in the name of goodness we wanted now. He protested several times against our wasteful extravagance, and the expense to which we were putting him, in a much injured tone, as though we were there of our own choice. Above all, the waste of candles irritated him the most.

‘ You’re got to do wirout ’em,’ he shouted one day in reply to my request. ‘ The young un’s done wirout ’em, and you’re got to do wirout ’em ; do you understand that ?’

But on my suggesting the alternative of lighting a bonfire the candles came quickly enough. I also insisted on a supply of linen being sent down for the 'young un,' and a change for myself, promising to let him have my clothes to wash regularly every week ; and though he swore with the most emphatic oaths at his command that he would never accede to these demands, every one of them was complied with as soon as I raised my voice in anger to a pitch that might be heard outside the cottage.

We were not unmindful of the future. Every day we put by something out of the supply of food, in case of accident ; and, foreseeing Psyche's wants when we made our escape, I took the measurement of her little foot, and sent it up with a demand that shoes of that size should be sent down the next day. I am not sure that old Peter, who became exceedingly recalcitrant towards the last, would have given in to this, but just at that time my grandfather got about, and old Peter, with a heavy volley of parting

curses, disappeared one morning, and we saw and heard him above us no more ; and though my grandfather, adopting old Peter's manner and style of speaking, swore lustily enough that we had 'got to do wirout 'em,' he truckled under, and the shoes came down the next morning.

But a preparation of far greater importance than this gave me great concern. I had to make the girl understand something of the great world into which she would go when she left the cave in which she had passed her life—the world in which probably ~~she~~ would go one way and I another—fearing that the sudden revelation of such a world would take away her reason, just as the glare of day might blind her if I did not now accustom her eyes to the light of a candle. To do this I had to teach her to speak, and train her imagination to form ideas from the sound of words.

She was not wanting in intelligence, and quickly picked up the use of such words as were necessary to our immediate wants. She

was as ready to learn as I to teach ; and sat beside me hour after hour in our time of rest, repeating what she had heard, and adding to her store of phrases. For over three months she studied in this way, never showing a sign of impatience or lassitude, and then a change came. Naturally, she understood what I said to her far better than she could express her own meaning—at last comprehending what I said so well that she rarely asked me to repeat a word or change the form of a phrase. Then her interest in learning declined. The incentive was gone now that she had mastered the difficulty of understanding words ; and it seemed to me that her tongue was stiller than when she could merely babble without reason.

When I urged her to speak she would nestle closer to my arm, smoothing her cheek against my shoulder coaxingly, with a faint, half-sad smile.

‘Talk to me,’ she would murmur ; ‘talk to me as you did when I knew nothing but what I saw in your face. You have so much to

tell me about ; I have nothing to tell you that you do not know.'

Her phrases were ungrammatical and broken, like a child's, but this was their meaning.

So I talked, and she was content to listen, sitting as still as a mouse. I told her about the wide-spreading sky and the glorious sun that rose on one side and set on the other in soft clouds of beautiful colours, and of the moon that came when he was gone, and of the myriads of stars, like the little one we saw at times through the hole in the cave, that spangled the heavens all over, when neither sun nor moon was there to dim them ; and then I spoke about the broad sea and the things in it and on it, and the fields of green grass dappled with bright-coloured flowers, and the trees where birds far prettier than Caw sang songs almost like her own.

She never tired of hearing these descriptions, but they did not excite her with any eager desire to escape from the cave and

see and hear all that she loved to be told about. I fancy they must have been to her like those descriptions of Paradise, which tickle our ears, but fail to stimulate us with a desire to go there one moment before the inevitable time.

Indeed, the outer world must have been as incomprehensible to her stunted imagination as the idea of limitless space or infinite time is to the majority of ordinary people. She could form no conception of a world that had no chalk walls.

She seemed to take greater interest in hearing about men and women than about things. The existence of other human beings in another cave was understandable, but her delicate brows creased in perplexity to hear that the number of men like myself, and girls like her, was beyond our counting.

'Do they all live together?' she asked in bewilderment.

I tried to explain how people were grouped in communities, and the communities divided

into families, and how the families, while the children were young, lived all under the same roof, but scattered and went different ways when they grew up, leaving only the old ones to live together. She could not think that was good, and one evening, when I told her I hoped to find her family, she said :

‘What is the use, if we are all to live separate in different caves?’

This idea, I am sure, occupied her thoughts a good deal. One day she coaxed me to neglect work, herself showing a repugnance to it for the first time.

‘Talk, talk!’ she said, holding my arm.

‘But there is work to do. The water is out. I must not lose a minute.’

‘Why do you want to get out into that world?’ she added. ‘Must you live alone, too? There are three caves here. I will go in the next one if you do not want me with you. And then this will be better than that great one, where all go away from those who love them.’

'We'll talk about that another time, Psyche,' said I, rising.

She let me go alone for half a dozen steps —it was the first sign of opposition on her part; then she sprang up with a cry of regret, and, overtaking me, mutely looked into my face, her eyes pleading for forgiveness.

And that morning she worked in the burrow as she had never worked before. To see her, one would have thought that her happiness, rather than mine, depended on our escape.

I tried in vain to obtain some history of the past from her; she could reveal nothing beyond her life in the caves. 'Always here, always the same till you came,' she said.

Days and weeks and months slipped away without seeming tedious, even to me; to Psyche they were all too short. We rarely worked for less than ten hours a day, and every fresh inch of progress in the burrow added to my hope of a happy end. In the

intervals between work and sleep we amused ourselves sometimes in playing bowls with the rounded pieces of chalk that we found in our excavation ; sometimes in carving a running scroll that I designed on the wall of the smaller cave. The latter amusement pleased Psyche greatly. She had a strong imitative faculty, and became very deft in the use of a knife in carving ; but the great charm of this occupation was that it beautified our dwelling-place. No lady could be more fastidious about the arrangement of her drawing-room than she was about the wretched appointments of these miserable caves ; she seized eagerly any suggestion for making them more habitable. Caw was no longer allowed to perch on the loaf, nor was he permitted to hop across the table at meal-times.

She became scrupulously careful about her personal appearance. When we came from the burrow, all bedabbled and grimed with salt water and sand, she retired into her alcove, which I had screened with a blanket, and thence she came forth in due time dressed

in her best, and with shoes and stockings on. She was prodigiously proud of the addition of shoes to her costume, as being like mine, and never let me see that they pained her every time she moved—for she had worn them some weeks before I discovered, by accident, that they were far too small for her poor feet. Taking me as her model, she would have cut her hair short like mine, but I forbade that, and taught her to plait it in two long tails—which was the only arrangement I could think of in the absence of hair-pins—to her immense delight.

Without doubt, a great and good change, physical as well as moral, was produced in her by the altered circumstances of her life. She made flesh ; her cheek lost its hollowness, and a little colour came into it ; her shoulders expanded, her arms grew plump, and her figure developed more graceful curves. She was more human. At first her laughter brought tears into my eyes, but now there was a joyous ring in it that made me glad. She had a healthy love of gaiety and fun, and a

most human craving for praise and admiration. Only when she grew tired something of the old elfish, pensive sadness came back to her face, and at these times she would forsake her amusements and coax me to talk about the world she was going to, and the people in it, sitting wistfully silent by my side.

* * * * *

It was on the 30th of August—just four months and three days from the day I was made prisoner—that a stroke of Psyche's hatchet brought down a cone of wet sand, and a shred of light streamed into our tunnel through a crack at the edge of the chalk over our heads. ‘At last!’ I cried, driving my hatchet into the crack, and so widening the gap that a great flood of light burst upon us.

With a moan of pain Psyche dropped her axe and covered her eyes with her hands. Frantic joy made me brutally indifferent to her suffering ; I thought only of my recovered liberty, and, dropping the hatchet, tore away the sand and shingle with my hands, until I had made a hole through which I wriggled

my body. Then I stood up, and stretched out my arms towards the open sky over my head, thanking God aloud with a choking voice for His mercy.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAINT cry of despair reminded me of my selfish forgetfulness, and, turning about, I discovered Psyche standing at a little distance from me, with her arms outspread, vainly endeavouring to see in the light that blinded her. There was a piteous, bewildered look in her face, that seemed to say, ‘I am abandoned. What shall I do in this world where each one goes his way?’

And then, when I looked at her hair matted with the sand, her drabbled dress hanging heavily from her shoulders with the sea wash from the burrow, my heart reproached me for my ingratitude. For she had toiled as much as I—nay, more; cheerfully ready at any hour of the night or day to bury herself in the wet sand, to dig and drag as she was

bidden, suffering hardships with smiles, risking her life fearlessly day and night for months in the struggle to make me happy, and all for this—to be forgotten in the first moment of my freedom !

‘Oh, you are not gone !’ she exclaimed, clutching my hand as I touched her and spoke her name. ‘Not yet,’ she added, striving to open her eyes that she might see me.

‘I shall never leave you, Psyche,’ I said ; ‘I only forgot you for a minute in the first joy of seeing the world again.’

‘Is it so very beautiful?’ she asked. ‘I can see nothing but a light that makes me ache.’

‘The sun is right over our heads ; it makes me blink to look up. When he goes down you will be able to look at the glory of it. But you feel the beautiful fresh air, don’t you ?’

‘Yes, it is good—like drinking when you are thirsty.’

‘Yes, that is true, and the sight of the blue sky is like that too.’

‘I wish I could look at it,’ she said, raising her pale face, and moving her head from side to side. ‘How warm it is! Tell me what you can see.’

‘Nothing but the sun, and sky, and cliffs, and some jackdaws playing about up there.’

‘I hear them, I hear them,’ she said joyfully—‘Caw, caw, caw !’

‘We are surrounded by great masses of broken cliff; they shut out the view of the sea. But we can climb over them and make our way to the open shore, as soon as the light fades and you can use your eyes.’

‘Why should we wait, if you want to get there? You can guide me in the light, just as I used to guide you in the dark—do you remember?’ she asked tenderly.

‘Yes, I remember, dear. But I dare not venture now; the tide is rising, and we may be hemmed in. It will be better to wait till the tide ebbs; then we shall have nothing to fear, and shall both see. Besides, we have our things to get; we should be laughed at if we showed ourselves in this state.’

'I will put on my shoes ; no one will laugh at me then.'

A wave ran up between the rocks and touched our feet ; it was time to return. We wriggled back into our burrow, the mouth of which I stopped as well as I could with pieces of chalk, to prevent the inrush of sand, and backed into the cave, dragging the bucket after us with the sand dug out in our passage.

The eight hours that followed were the longest and most tedious I had yet endured. I had long ago decided upon the course I should take when we got out of the cave, and there now seemed absolutely nothing to do. To dispel the tedium, I was almost tempted to make an expedition into French Peter's cave ; I was deterred rather by the uselessness than the danger of the venture. The treasure was safer there than it could be anywhere else, and it would have been alike dangerous and futile to encumber ourselves with it in our flight.

At six o'clock my grandfather whistled

down the well, and lowered a basket of provisions.

' You're got to do wirout bread to-night, 'cause the baker ain't been to-day,' he called.
‘ But you'll get double allowance to-morrow mornin' if you behave yourself.’

I emptied the basket, and sent it up without a word; but I mentally promised to behave myself in a manner that would astonish him before another day was out.

At eight o'clock we went into the tunnel, and had an hour's work in clearing away the sand washed in by the tide. At length the passage was free, and Psyche, looking up, saw the countless stars in mute wonder.

‘ Our work is done; we can put on our best now,’ I said to her.

We went back and changed our clothes—I trembling and my teeth chattering with excitement.

‘ Must we leave all?’ Psyche asked in a low voice, when she came from her alcove.

‘ Yes; there is nothing here that we shall

ever want again, please God,' said I. 'Wait; there is the food we have put by in case of need. I will put it out for Caw.'

'Yes, poor Caw! He will never sit on my shoulder any more. We shan't have to scold him for coming on our table again.'

I ran into the other cave and threw all our store on the slab that served us for a table, while Psyche remained in the lesser one. Through the opening I saw her by the light of the candle that stood on the ground touching with her cheek the carving in the chalk on which we had spent so many hours together, and laying her hand tenderly on the hatchets we had used in our work; and when we descended for the last time into the pit she turned round, and, spreading her arms towards the cave as if to take in all that was dear to her, said, 'Good-bye!'

The moon had not yet risen, but the stars gave us, inured to obscurity, ample light to find our way between the rocks and over the scattered masses of cliff to the open shore; but it would have been another thing to have

retraced our steps through such a chaos to the hole from which we had come. Happily, we got clear of the sea-swept boulders while the tide was yet low.

Psyche gazed at the boundless expanse of sea and sky in silent awe for some time, and then she murmured half to herself, ‘ Too large, too great ! ’ But she was delighted with the stars, and when, rounding Deadman’s Point, we came in sight of the young moon hanging over the water with the shadowed disc in its embrace, a low cry of rapture came from her lips. We got on to the downs by the gap beyond Deadman’s Point, and struck across for the old London road, and now that we had no cliff beside us, Psyche’s wonder at the unbroken expanse around us was inexpressible. ‘ No walls ! ’ she said. And the soft grass under her feet in place of the sand she had always known was another marvel. She tried to scoop it up in her hand as if it were sand, and when I plucked some and put it in her palm, she laughed at the oddity of this new world.

We had not yet met a single living creature, but as we neared the road I heard sounds of footsteps and voices, and Psyche told me she saw two persons coming, one little and one big. A few seconds afterwards I saw a stout woman and a boy laden with bundles. Psyche slipped round and clung to my other arm to be safe, while she strained her eyes in wonder to see a girl so large and a man so small.

'Mrs. Benham,' I said, recognising my old landlady as we drew near.

'Surely that's not Mr. Bernard come back!' she exclaimed.

'It is indeed, and I'm on my way to take possession of my old rooms, if you have not let them to anyone else.'

'Bless your heart, no, sir! There they are just as you left them. I shouldn't have had the heart to let 'em to anyone else if I'd had the chance. Little did I think you would ever come back to them; and it's a real comfort in the midst of my trouble to see you again. There, take the keys, sir; there they

are all, and you know the look of 'em almost as well as I do. You haven't heard the sad news, I'll warrant ; how should you, when I've only just got the message by telegraph myself ? The lad there brought it, and scared me out of my wits, nearly half an hour ago. My poor son has been landed from his ship at Southampton with a fever, and there he lies now in a stranger's house with no one to care for him. And now I'm on my way to Bonport to catch the last train, though while I am talking here I may lose it. I will write to you to-morrow and tell you more, and you will let me know all about your own affairs, that I have no time to ask about now, though I am dying with curiosity to know how you have fared and everything.'

'Everything' included Psyche, whose uncovered head and bare arms drew her eyes from me in perplexity, even while her mind was so divided between thoughts of her son and myself. As for the telegraph messenger, who was carrying a part of the

old lady's hastily-packed luggage, he could scarcely close his mouth or take his eyes off Psyche, even when Mrs. Benham trotted on, calling him to come along.

'Who is that one that you spoke to?' whispered Psyche as we went our way.

'A dear old friend. We are going to live in her house.'

'House—that is a cave.'

'Yes, a kind of cave. I lived with her before I came to you.'

'Not very long?'

'Yes; years—much longer than I have lived with you.'

'Then everyone does not go a different way—some stay together.'

—'Oh yes. A son sometimes stays with his mother, even when he is no longer a child. A brother may live with his sister till they grow quite old.'

'Will you be my brother?'

'Yes, Psyche; that is just what I should like to be.'

She hugged my arm close, and was silent

for awhile. I pointed to the trees of The Chase park as we neared them. She looked at them indifferently, reminding me that I had told her about them. Then presently, while I wondered what she was pondering, she said :

‘ You like that old woman ?’

‘ Yes ; she has been like a mother to me.’

‘ But you didn’t talk to her as you talk to me,’ she said, smiling and shaking her head.

‘ What makes you think that ?’

‘ Oh, I am sure of it,’ she answered with delighted satisfaction, ‘ and that shows that you like your sister more than you like your mother.’

I laughed, and then, having come to the cottage, I told her that it was here we were to live. She looked at it incredulously, for to her it seemed no more than a strangely-fashioned mass of rock, and could hardly believe her senses when I opened the door and showed her it was habitable.

I lit a candle and took her through the rooms below, and then up the stairs to the rooms above, and she was speechless with wonder at the strangeness of it and all the surprising contrivances it contained. When I got her to speak I found that she did not admire the rooms. After the caves they were as much too small as the world was too large. The low flat ceilings and squared walls were ugly to her eyes. But the quantity and variety of colour everywhere delighted her. Two things astonished her beyond the rest—a looking-glass, and a rose growing in a pot. The glass she thought must be water ; the scent of the rose took her breath away. She was charmed with the canary that hung in the sitting-room—it was such a wee little ‘caw,’ and so prettily coloured ! I put it in her bedroom, telling her that it would sing to her in the morning.

‘ Show me how I may take him out of his house,’ she said.

‘ No, you must not do that,’ said I. ‘ He would fly away if you did.’

She looked into my face in mournful silence for a moment, and then she said :

‘ Does everything that we love in this world fly away and leave us ? ’

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Psyche had called her last 'good-night' to me from her room, as in the cave it was her custom to do before composing herself to sleep, I stole out of the house to breathe again the fresh air and enjoy the full sense of freedom.

After standing awhile gazing all round at the heavens with an ineffable joy in my heart, I passed through the garden, and turning instinctively towards The Chase, followed the familiar path to the park gates, my step growing quicker and more elastic under an elation that was easily to be accounted for. When I left The Chase I had no prospect more hopeful than that of realizing Sir Henry Duncan's cynical suggestion by finding a Golconda. Well, I had found

what to me was a Golconda, and now I could face Sir Henry and demand his daughter's hand.

It was nearly midnight; there was no light in the lodge-keeper's window. The gate was unlocked, and not a hundred yards down the drive there was a bend from which the house could be seen. With no excuse but a lover's folly, I passed the gate and walked to the bend, and there I stood for fully five minutes gazing at a solitary light in one of the windows, giving a loose rein to my fancy, and letting it carry me into a Paradise where I saw no face but Ethel Duncan's.

When at length I turned to go back I perceived a tall gray figure standing in the alley, formed by a footpath which turned from the drive at the bend. It was Sir Henry; I recognised him at a glance. There was nothing extraordinary in his being there at this hour, even if the night had been less tempting to a late stroll. He was a man of odd, ascetic habits, sometimes con-

fining himself for days together in one room, at others wandering on the downs night after night in weather that made even the coastguard shirk his duty.

'Who are you?' he asked, stepping forward.

'Bernard Thorne.'

'I thought so,' he said, and then, placing himself before me with a stride as I was about to pass on, he added, in a peremptory tone, 'Tell me what you are doing here.'

I hesitated to answer, feeling that I had placed myself in a ridiculous position.

'You have come here to see my daughter,' he said in an angry tone of conviction. 'You have written to her.'

'I have done nothing of the kind.'

'Is that true?' he asked in a tone that stung me.

'You have never known me attempt to deceive you,' I answered warmly.

'Indeed! You promised you would not return until you had a fortune to offer my daughter.'

‘And on that condition you suffered me to hope that I might make her my wife. It was an expedient, perhaps, to get rid of me. You did not expect me to return before you had married your daughter to a husband more to your taste than your late secretary. But you held out that hope to me; I accepted it; and now that you see me here you know the reason—I have a fortune to offer your daughter.’

‘It is incredible. I was told you had gone to America. Even there you have not had time to make a fortune—honestly.’

‘I dare not trust my tongue to answer you after that insinuation,’ said I, stepping aside in order to pass him.

‘Wait,’ he said, putting his stick rudely before me. ‘Our estimate of fortunes may differ considerably. What is this fortune you have made?’

‘I cannot tell you. It may be ten thousand pounds; it may be less.’

‘Ten thousand pounds! Do you know that my daughter may accept a husband with

twenty times that amount. You mistake your position. What is ten thousand pounds ?'

'Enough to make me independent of your generosity, and that is all I sought. I dare now to ask your daughter to be my wife, and it is for her—not you—to decide whether I shall be her husband or not.'

'One moment. One question at least I have a right to ask, and one which you, with the antecedents of your family before you, ought to answer. How have you come by this money ?'

'I am not in a state of mind at this moment to tell you my history. If I told you now you would think me more mad than my presence here at this time gives you reason to suppose I am. In a proper time and place I will tell you all.'

'Before you speak to my daughter ?'

'Yes.'

Upon that we separated without another word.

I greatly regretted this meeting with Sir

Henry, and the avowal it had led me to make. For, ardently as I desired to meet Miss Duncan, and put my fate in her hands—a desire that was now made more urgent by Sir Henry's hint that he had a richer husband in view, and the fear that by delay I might lose her—I felt that I must do my duty by my faithful little friend, and provide for Psyche's future happiness before I considered my own. I must wring a confession of the mysterious crime from my grandfather, and find the girl's family. I had promised not to abandon her, but without that promise my heart would never have suffered me to go away from her, as she pathetically put it, until I had found those who had a right to take my place as her guardian and dearest friend. If Sir Henry Duncan thought fit to question my grandfather about the fortune I had acquired, the old rascal, discovering my escape, would, to avoid unpleasant consequences to himself, get out of the way before I could draw a confession from him.

I reflected also that Mrs. Benham or the telegraph boy might spread the news of my return in Bonport, and that this would speedily reach old Peter's ears and put both the old rascals on the alert. However, there was one simple way of securing my grandfather, and that was to forestall others by tackling him at the very earliest hour. With the determination to go over to the Halfway House as soon as it got light, I returned to the cottage and lay down without taking off my clothes, that I might not oversleep myself. Nevertheless, it was broad daylight and past six o'clock when I awoke, and then it was only Psyche's cry of delight from the next room that aroused me. The canary was singing.

'Hark, the little caw!' she cried.

I bade her sleep again until I called her, and slipped noiselessly out of the house, fearing my going would trouble her if she knew it.

Looking down to the shore from the cliff at Deadman's Point, I saw the waves bursting

over the scattered rocks where we had risen from our burrow the day before. The great blocks were so closely thrown together that it was impossible to distinguish the exact spot, and I knew that by this time the sea had washed in the sand and effaced every outside trace of our work. It seemed to me now hardly possible that we two could have been lying toiling under that fallen cliff for over four months. Something unpleasantly akin to a thirst for vengeance possessed me as I neared the Halfway House and thought of the old villains who had doomed me to perpetual imprisonment there, and who had robbed poor Psyche of all that makes youth and life worth having.

Turning the handle softly, I found that the door was locked. The blinds were drawn down. Over the window pane I had broken to get into the place on the day of my capture, a sheet of brown paper had been pasted. I wetted my fingers, struck it in the middle, and made a hole through the brown paper without noise. My grandfather was

stumping about in the washhouse, for this was about the hour when he sent down our breakfast. Taking advantage of the noise he made, I tore down the brown paper, slipped my arm through, and unfastened the catch. The next minute I had the sash up, and the minute after that I was standing in the little parlour.

The washhouse door was closed. I opened it without noise, and found my grandfather in front of me, leaning over the well with the cord in his hand. For just one moment my fingers Itched to slip that cord round his neck and pitch him down the well.

He was whistling lustily—a signal which either Psyche or I usually answered at once.

'Can't make the beggars hout,' he muttered; 'in gen' al they comes fast enough for their grub, and it's a lucky day when that gallus Barnerd don't holler out for extrys.' He left off muttering, and recommenced whistling and jerking the cord.

'What's the marrer wi' you—are you hill?' he roared. After waiting a minute or two he

drew up the bucket to see if it had been emptied. When it came up full he set it on the edge of the well and scratched his head.

‘Good Lord, if one on ‘em’s dead!’ he murmured; and then, looking round in the scared way of those whose consciences are ill at ease, he caught sight of me standing within a couple of paces of him. His jaw dropped, his face turned gray, his eyes started from their sockets, and he staggered back to the wall, stretching out his quivering hands to keep me off. His old jaw closed and fell as he attempted to speak, and his breath caught in his parched windpipe with a click at each respiration. At length he gasped out :

‘God forgive me if I ever done you harm. Lord knows I’ve alust acted for the best according to my lights. ’Twasn’t me as put you down. Father’s got to answer for all that, a gallus, wicked old man. I’ve supplied ye reg’lar—denied ye nothin’.’ He broke off with a choke, terrified out of his wits by my silence and immobility. Then he gasped

again, loosening his neckcloth with one hand and motioning me back with the other :

' For God's sake speak ! tell me you're not his fitch ! tell me I haven't murdered my Sukey's boy !'

CHAPTER XV.

I SUPPOSE my appearance was not sufficiently ghostly to create more than a temporary effect upon my grandfather; for after regarding me with unreasoning horror as he crouched against the wall for a few minutes, the strained muscles of his face relaxed, a look of hopeful doubt and suspicion twinkled in his blue eye, and he breathed more easily. Gradually he straightened himself, and with growing confidence rolled his tongue round his cheek once or twice, and spoke :

‘ You don’t mean to say as it’s your identical self, Barnerd! you don’t go for to tell me as you’re got out in the night like a thief in the same, and as you’re come here for a sort of a spree to frighten your po’r old grandfather into a hillness !’

'I am your grandson Bernard—so much the worse for me; and I have got out—so much the worse for you. But I have not come here for a spree: I have come to call you to account.'

'Where's the other one—her?' he asked, nodding towards the well.

'Not down there.'

'Where are you took her to?'

'Where you can do her no more harm.'

'Lord! what'll father say to this?' exclaimed the old man in a tone of consternation.

'We shall hear what he has to say when he is brought to justice.'

'You're not going to inform on him? You won't send a old man of ninety-fower to prison?'

'It may be that both of you will end your days in gaol. You have no right to expect more mercy than you have shown to that helpless child, whose life you have blasted.'

My grandfather tottered, clinging to the edge of the well for support.

'Sonny,' said he faintly, drawing the back

of his hand across his forehead, ‘I can’t go no furder like this. I must have a drop to keep me up, or my legs ’ll give under me.’

He passed into the next room, and I followed close at his heels. Taking an innocent-looking teapot from the corner cupboard, he drew a cork from the spout and helped himself to a dram.

‘Now I’m better,’ said he stoutly, as he rested himself, ‘let’s hear what you’re got to say. If it depends on me to save father from going to gaol, you may depend upon my doin’ my duty as a son.’

‘Do you see that?’ I asked, pointing to one of the texts with which the walls were plentifully decorated.

‘Yes ; I sees it fast enough ; but what it’s all about I dun’ know. They comes here, these Scripsher-readers, and sticks ’em up accordian to their fancy, but I can’t read ’em.’

“ ‘Honesty is the best policy,’ that’s what it says ; and I advise you to keep that in mind ; for if I have reason to doubt the

honesty of the confession you have to make to me, I shall go at once to Bonport, and bring you and your father before judges who will find means to get the truth out of you.'

The old man looked at me with deep cunning in his shifty eyes as he turned over the quid in his cheek, and then he said :

' You know you can depend on my word, sonny, else you'd ha' gone to the justices fust.'

' I have come to you first because I would spare myself the shame of seeing you in the felon's dock ; but I am prepared to meet that shame to learn the truth.'

' What do you want to know ?'

' I must know all about the poor girl you have kept in the caves from her childhood.'

' Right you are, sonny. Now, you look in my face, and I'll look in yours, and if you see me so much as wink an eye, set me down for a liar. Now then, start on !'

With these words he planted his hands firmly on his knees, bent forward, and so

fixed his eyes that they looked as if they were of glass and several sizes too large.

‘Who is that girl?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know no more than what you do.’

‘What is her name?’

‘I can’t tell you: on my dyin’ oath I don’t know.’

‘How long have you kept her down there?’

‘Twelve years last July the thirteenth.’

‘Where did you take her from?’

‘We didn’t take her; she was give to us by a man.’

‘Who was that man?’

‘I don’t know: I’ll take my oath on it.’

If honesty may be gauged by the ability of a man to look you straight in the eyes, then my grandfather was as honest in this declaration as anyone could desire.

‘How did the child come into your hands?’ I asked.

‘That’s a question as I can’t answer in two words. It’s a longish story; but I’ll tell it you just as fair and square as if I was

before a judge and jury. And look you here, sonny, you think I'm a hard-hearted, un-christian Philistine; but I'm going to show you the contraries, and then if you think I'm only fit to rot out the rest of my days in a gaol, you can go and peach on me, and be d——d to you.'

With this he struck the table a blow with his fist, and turned over his quid; then, fixing his eyes again on me, he began :

' It was twelve years ago, as I tell you, the thirteenth of July, that me and father was wuss off than ever we'd been in our life. Father had just done his seven year; Sukey's money was all gone; you was at school earnin' nothing, and only kep' there because it was cheaper than keepin' of you elsewhere, seein' as the payment was allowed to run on like, in consideration of your bein' a kind of school help; and the smuggling business was reg'lar finished for good and all. We was that pinched we'd scarce got the price of a plug betwixt us—and that was got through me reforming. Well, just then

comes this man to father, and asks him if he'd mind takin' of a chest out to sea, and droppin' of it in a clear five miles from land, which this here job was to be done that night. Father smelt a rat, and said that if this were a contraband job he'd have to be paid heavy for the risk he run. The man owned it was a contraband job, and the chest must not be opened by us nor anyone else ; and he'd give us something han'som if we pulled it off all right, but not a farden if we didn't. Father—he säys, säys he, proud like, "I've a-been a smuggler," he säys, "man and boy seventy-one year"—he was then heighthy-two—"and I've never lost so much as a quid of baccy ; and it don't stand to reason as I'm going to be run down now." The man answered and said he knowed father's record, and that's why he'd applied to him. So it was agreed there and then that father should have a boat ready waitin' off Deadman's Point at high water, which was half after eleven. Father was for doin' the job all alone, but he couldn't get no one to lend him a boat,

'cause, you see, he wasn't known like nor much respected at Bonport, havin' just come off his seven year at Dartmoor. So in this here fix he comes to me; and I goin' to church reg'lar, and drawin' my bread every Sunday, was that trusted that a Plymouth Brother lent me his boat in the afternoon to pull to Towerbridge, I a-makin' out as the rheumatics didn't allow of my walking. I takes the boat and lays round the p'int, out of sight, till nightfall. And as pretty a night it was as ever I see for harvestin' a crop o' tubs, with the wind comin' right out o' the sou'west, the rain a-comin' down a treat, and as black as a hedge. At eleven o'clock we beaches the boat, and at half after comes this man with his chest. There was not a word spoke: we put the chest in, run the boat down, and the job, I counted, was as good as finished. We pulled out without a light till we was about a couple of mile out, and then father, leaving the work to me, lugs out a bit of a lantern from his pocket, and spreadin' his tarpaulin over it, takes and lights

it with a lucifer. "Father," I säys, säys I, "we don't want no light for this job, and the lamp may do us a mischief." "Speak when you're spoke to, young un," he says—"young un" he called me, though I was over sixty—"speak when you're spoke to. I'm goin' to see what's in this here chest. It ain't the fust time I've known half-hearted uns chuck away stolen property when they thought it might lead to information." And with that he shoves a cold chisel under the lid, and with a sharp wrinch bustes it open. "Curse it!" säys he, showin' the lamp inside, "it ain't nothing but a gal." And as I leant for'ard I see there a child looking like as if it was comferably asleep, with a little twist of hair blowin' about in the breeze. "Is it dead?" I säys. "Of course it is," säys he. "Do you think it 'ud lay still and not snivel if it wern't?" And he was taking his lantern out, and goin' to fling the lot out in disgust, when I stops him, for, by the Lord! I see the child's eyes open under the light. The wind and rain had kind o' revived it, I reckon.

"Father," I säys, "it's alive!" "Well, we won't give it time to get fractious," säys he, banging down the lid. Now, sonny, I hadn't never done any job of this sort before, and I turned sick at the thought of heaving that living child into the sea like a mangy dog; for she looked to me the very daps of my Sukey when she was a little un. Then, as father laid hold of the chest, for to heave it out, the sickness inside of me seemed to turn to fire, and I what had never dared tell father my soul was my own, I upped and told him, with a voice as didn't seem to belong to me, as I'd peach on him, if he hanged for it. Father he was goin' to knock my head off my shoulders then and there; but on second thoughts, he din't. After turnin' of it over in his mind a bit, he säys, säys he: "If we don't drown the young un, what *are* we to do with it? It don't stand to reason that we're goin' to lose the price of this here job." "Well," säys I, "you pull me into Pringle's Hole, and I'll run up with it home, which I may well do wirout bein' seen in such a love

of a night as this here. Then I'll come back, and we'll pull out a bit and then into Deadman's P'int, and take the money off the gent."

"That's all right for to-night," he säys ; "but what are you goin' to do with the varment to-morrow, and never after ?" "Do with it !" säys I ; "I'll rare it up like as if it was my own child."

'We disputed of it a long while, but at last father give in, and we carried out my plan accordian—the gent looking in the boat when we run in to Deadman's P'int, and goin' off quite content.'

My grandfather shifted his position, passed his tongue round his cheek once or twice, and resumed, with fresh fixity in his eyes :

'I'm a-tryin' to recollect the succumstances exact, so as I may not accidentally tell a huntruth,' he explained. 'Next day father called on me, and seein' the youngster layin' in bed covered up, he säys, "Is she dead ?"

"No," säys I ; "but she seems very queer, and I don't think she's goin' to live, for she haven't spoke a word, and only took a drop o' milk since here she's been." "Well," säys he

in his masterful way, "if she don't die you've got to keep her down in the caves; and if you don't keep her down there, by the laws I'll find a way to do for her. I've been thinking this thing over, and I'm ashamed of myself for givin' in like I did. I've acted upright with my employers, man and boy, over seventy year, and I ain't goin' to be found out actin' shabby now. We was paid to put the varment away, and you're got to put her away, or *I will*," säys he. I knew he meant it, for I never knew father to tell a lie in business. "I'll drop in to-morrow and see how things is goin'," he säys when he left. The child got better that afternoon, though she was not clear in her head, being always kind o' half silly. So seein' she were not goin' to die, I had a go with my conscience as to what was best for to be done. Now, if I defies father, what's goin' to happen? I asks myself. Answer—Why, one fine mornin' the young un 'll disappear as sure as ever is. What then? Answer—I shall be the cause of father committin' a wicked crime,

and have to answer for the young un's comin' to a untimely hend. Puttin' of it the other way about, what then? I shall save the young un's life, and keep father's hands clean—leastways, as clean as what they are at present. Moreover, thinks I, I shall be keepin' that child out of harm's way, and bringin' of her up in the ways of innocence. For what is the roots of all sin in this world? Why, temptation. Well, there won't be no temptation down in them caves, and no goin' astray, anyhow. So havin' argeyed it out this way, sonny, it looked to me as if I was doin' the most righteous thing out for to take her down below and keep her there. Which I did. I took her down there, and made her comferable. I learnt her to wash herself, and all manner. Day after day I went down there, to see how she were gettin' on, for nigh three months, and then, seein' she was just as happy wirout me as what she was with me, bein' always a kind of a natural, and not in possession of her mind, as you may say, and seein', likewise, as I got a bad attack of rheumatism, so

I wasn't equal to gettin' up and down easy, I dropped it, and din't go down no more. But every day reg'lar I let down her food, and now and then such little treats as new clothes, and blankets and beddin', which she had learnt for to take when I called, as before leavin' I had showed her. Well, sonny, Heaven has smiled on my hefforts. The child has growed up in innocence, and content, and been blessed with remarkable health; not a day has she missed singin' of her little song to me to show her gratefulness for my kindness till you went down there and hupset the applecart of contentment. She's lived a reg'lar life—which is what we all should pray for; and I ask you if it is likely she would have done the same if exposed to temptations, rough weather, and things what plays the deuce with our constitootions. Hear me out, sonny; you shall have your say d'rectly. You think I'm a gallus hard-hearted Philistian, I know; but you can't accuse me of bein' careless of the young un's welfare. You see what a takin' I was in

when I broke my leg and couldn't let down the food regular, and how I betrayed myself and father to you rather than let her want for a day's grub. But I'll give you a proof more stronger than that of my abidin' thought and kindness. I'm goin' to show you what it would cost me my life for father to know. I'm goin' to show you what's in that little bag I wears round my neck, and was so fearful about bein' discovered when I went off at the Trusty Mariner. You remember that I told you if I went off and didn't come back, you was to open it; din't I? Well, it was all that the young un shouldn't come to no harm after I had cut my everlastin' cable. There, look at that there !'

The old man had unbuttoned his waistcoat, and brought out from beneath his shirt the leather bag that hung round his neck. From this he drew a folded piece of cloth, and opened it. On it were pasted down a dozen scraps of paper, each written upon by a different hand.

'I can't read, and I can't write,' he ex-

plained ; ‘but I’ve got varios friends to jot down the words I wanted at odd times, so as none could tell what I was arter, or the meanin’ of what they writ, and I’ve put ’em together as I got them done. There you are. You’re a scholard ; read that.

‘ | Under the Half-way House| | betwixt Sandy-haven and Tower-bridge,’| | ‘ there’s two| | caves,| | and in them caves| | There’s a live female.| | To get her go down,| | the well,| | in the centre| | Of the wash-house| | At the back of the kitchen,| | And go through| | the brick passage near the bottom.| | The female will| | Die of Starvation| | unless rescued immediate.’

‘ There now, sonny,’ said my grandfather, when I had read this strange communication. ‘ If I had come to a sudden hend, they must have found that in layin’ of me out. So you see, I din’t only take care on her whilst I was living, but I pervised for her after my death. Could I do more ?’

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER hearing my grandfather's extraordinary story, I was disposed to take a more lenient view of the part he had played in it than had been previously presented. Indeed, I did not see how a man of his character could have done better—a character in which cunning supplied the place of moral strength, and the lawless proclivities of early days were oddly blended with the respectable tendencies of his later years.

I did not for a moment doubt that he had saved the child's life. In relating that part of the story his manner alone carried conviction. And it seemed to me quite possible that, with the distorted views of right and wrong which the ignorant owe to an imperfect comprehension of religious instruction

imperfectly given, he really looked upon himself as a benefactor to poor Psyche, in keeping her out of the way of temptation and sin. Certainly, if his story was to be believed, he had acted with more humanity towards her than if, in the first instance, he had simply washed his hands of the whole business and left that helpless child to the mercy of his father—a course which most men in his position would have taken.

But then, I was not quite certain that my grandfather's version of the story was to be believed.

It was not the improbability of the story that shook my faith in it, for nothing was ever produced by the imagination of man so *bizarre* as the stories in real life to be found in the file of a newspaper, and nothing in this story was so improbable as the fact of a human being existing for twelve years alone in a sunless cave—a fact I have since found paralleled in a dozen well-authenticated records. The thing I could not digest was my grandfather's exceeding disinterestedness :

that seemed to me quite too good to be true.

'Speak out, sonny, if you're got any question a burnin' in your mind,' said the old man, seeing that I was not quite satisfied. 'I'm prepared to answer any question; here am I, lookin' of you straight in the face.'

'How much money did you get for that job?' I asked.

'I can't tell you 'xactly how much; but quite a lot.'

'You must know how much your father gave you for your share.'

'Well, off and on, I dussay he's give me as much as fifty pound.'

'And you have managed to keep yourself and the girl on that for twelve years!—it's not quite two shillings a week. You remember that you hadn't enough to buy tobacco with twelve years ago.'

'Yes, my boy, I remember,' he replied, with that cunning look which was so out of character with some of his professions. 'But

you forget how virtue is rewarded here below, and what a lot I made by reforming my ways, and signin' pledges, and one thing and another.'

' But how about your father? He has not reformed. You signified that he could raise a hundred pounds to buy this cottage. Now, if he gave half, as he promised——'

' If! Why, you don't suppose he kep his word, do you ?'

I was compelled to admit that this was scarcely likely; and being stopped on this line of inquiry I opened another.

' What sort of man was it who gave you the child ?' I asked.

' He was a little, shortish kind of man,' said my grandfather, shifting in his chair; ' rather high shouldered, with red hair and a bottle nose.'

' You spoke of him in your narrative as a gentleman.'

' Well, sonny, what if I did? Look at Mr. Meaders, the horsedealer; there's a gent for you, and there's a bottle-nose !'

'But you said the night was pitch-dark. How could you tell whether he had red hair or not?'

The old man continued to look at me steadfastly for another minute; but he passed his tongue round his cheek, and I saw that I had him in a corner.

'Sonny,' he said at length, 'you see me shift just now. That was 'cause I was tellin' a huntruth. I never see that gent, for the darkness; and if I see him again I shouldn't know him from Adam. Only, as you seemed to want such a lot of pertic'lars, I tried for to oblige you.'

I felt I had got as much truth out of the cunning old fellow as I could hope to get for the present, and I rose, thinking of Psyche, whom I had left alone in the cottage.

'Barnard,' said my grandfather, rising also, 'what are you going to do?'

'Find out the truth about that poor girl.'

'You can try, suttinly; and I wish you luck. But look here: I'm goin' to give you a word of advice. I don't know what you're

done with the young un, and I only hope you are takin' as much care of her as what I have took. *She's got to be took care of, and in more ways than one.*' He spoke impressively and with genuine earnestness. ' You're got to keep a watchful eye on her, for fear she don't take and slip through your fingers. You're answerable for her now—not me. Mark that.'

I looked at him in perplexity ; his eyes were restless enough now. He opened the door, and cast a searching glance all round.

' Which way are you making for ?' he asked, as he came back.

I nodded in the direction of Towerbridge.

' Good !' said he. ' The coast is clear. Just one word more and I've done. Think over what I've said—specially them words of warning. Don't go a-telling everybody what you know. Don't go showing that gal round just for the sake of praise. If I thought you'd take advice I'd tell you to shift her right away ; but you young uns think too much of

yourselves to be guided ; but this here is something more than advice. I tell you you must look to it that father don't find you out.'

CHAPTER XVII.

REFLECTING on my grandfather's confession, the conviction grew upon me that he had not given me the true reason for Psyche's long captivity, and the urgent warning with which he concluded the interview confirmed this conviction. It was inconceivable that the man who had hired old Peter to drop the chest in the sea should offer a price to draw suspicion on his motives, and excite cupidity. Yet, according to my grandfather's statement, he had paid at least one hundred pounds for the service, while there was every reason to suppose, from their way of living, and the fact that old Peter could raise sufficient at a moment's notice to meet my demands, that the two old rascals between them must have received many hundreds of

pounds. Now, if the man had not paid old Peter a preposterous price for getting rid of the chest at the time, how had the rascals got the money ?

The answer to this question flashed upon me before I had left my grandfather ten minutes : they had extorted it since ; and Psyche had been kept alive for the purpose of blackmailing !

Old Peter had recognised the man or found means to identify him—possibly by the child or some betraying evidence in her dress—and had drawn money from him by threatening to produce the child in evidence of his attempted crime.

I saw now a double purpose in the warning that had been given me. My grandfather dreaded two things : his father's wrath, and the stoppage of those supplies which made life pleasant ; and those consequences might be averted by Psyche's escape remaining a secret. But, despite his rascality, I was disposed to give my grandfather credit for some kindly feeling towards Psyche. There

was a warmth in his cunning that seemed to come from his heart, and not from calculating self-interest. One thing was clear: if Psyche was still a source of revenue, old Peter would stop at no means, however desperate, to recover her, when he learnt that she had escaped from the cave; and I dreaded to think what might be her fate if he succeeded in getting her again in his power.

I found it difficult to decide what course I ought to take. It was obvious, however, that I must not precipitate a catastrophe by any rash movement, and for the present I must keep Psyche as much as possible out of sight.

Happily, circumstances favoured her seclusion. The light of the sun was so painful to the poor girl that we kept the blinds closely drawn down all day, and never left the house before the evening, and then curiosity never tempted her to stray from my side. To her the garden at the back of the cottage was a wide world, and in harmony with her tastes, perhaps, because it was

enclosed with high thick hedges ; it was a beautiful world, too, full of surprising treasures and lovely wonders. Every flower was a miracle, and the commonest herb a source of delight I never knew how much there was to admire in so small a space until she showed me. We have sat for hours watching a spider make its web ; we have followed an ant step by step down the long path to his retreat in a pot on the top of a dahlia stick—sympathizing with him when he went wrong and had to find his way back, congratulating him on meeting a friend who clearly put him up to a short cut, condoling with him when he got on tiresome ground, and found himself compassed about with a forest of chickweed—all with a growing interest in his career that only ended when we felt sure he was safe home at last.

Sometimes when we had watched the stars come out, until the heavens were full and the night well advanced, I took her away over the downs and showed her the sleeping villages, and the distant town of Towerbridge,

where she took the twinkling gas lamps for fallen stars ; but she was always glad to return to her beloved garden. Everything in the world was marvellous, she said, but there was nothing more beautiful or wondrous than the endless discoveries she made there. Mere largeness, which had never produced a pleasant impression on her mind, ceased to excite her wonder ; the larger animals—horses and kine—were not more surprising than night-moths and tiny insects, whose beauty escaped the sight of impatient observers. Her view of Nature at first appeared to me distorted, but I came to see that in many instances her judgment was truer than mine, and that my views were warped frequently by the influence of early teaching and conventional ideas ; certainly, through her I learnt to reverence God in small things as well as great.

The nights were mild and fine, and we spent them chiefly in the open air ; for Psyche was loath to go indoors even when the sun had risen and dimmed the world to

her eye. After seeing the stars 'go out' one by one, and the clouds take on the opal tints of morning ; after marking the first twitter of the swallows in the eaves and the lowing of cows ; when she had watched the flower-petals unclose and display their hidden beauties, and the first ray reflected in rainbow colours by the dewdrops hanging on leaf and gessamer, she would still linger with closed eyes to feel the sun's warmth on her upturned face and outstretched hands.

She slept through the day in her darkened room, and this gave me an opportunity to go over to Towerbridge, where I was not known, and get many things we needed in the way of food and clothing. I bought a couple of pretty dresses for Psyche, a square of lace for her head, a Shetland shawl, and some shoes with bright steel buckles ; and these things gave her great delight, for she was quite human, and loved as well as any other pretty girl to 'look nice.' I felt tolerably secure in leaving her alone at these times. Except The Chase, there was no house nearer

than the inland village of Eccleshall. Since the opening of the new road, the London road had been practically abandoned, and to the few who passed by, the isolated cottage, with its closed blinds, must have seemed abandoned also. No one knew that I had returned to inhabit it except Mrs. Benham, and her hasty departure had not given her time for gossiping with her acquaintances in Bonport. I received a letter from her, slipped under the door by the postman, telling me that she had taken rooms in Southampton for her son, who was too ill to be moved ; and in replying I begged her, for reasons I would give when she returned, not to mention my name to anyone.

Thus a week passed without my taking any steps to discover Psyche's friends or seeking an interview with Miss Duncan, seeing that I must habituate Psyche to the new life before introducing any change ; but at the end of that time, moved, I fear, rather by the jealous fear that Miss Duncan might be married to the husband her father had

chosen than by a disinterested consideration for Psyche's welfare, I sent an advertisement to be inserted in the second column of the *Times*. It ran thus :

' FOUND, a girl, thought to be between eighteen and nineteen years of age, who disappeared about July 14, 1877.—Apply for further information by letter to *The Finder*, Post-office, Towerbridge.'

Three days after posting this advertisement I walked over to Towerbridge, and asked at the post-office if there were any letters for 'The Finder.' The post-master handed me one. It was from a well-known firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn, asking me on, behalf of a client whose name was not given, to supply them with the information referred to in my advertisement.

Although the name of the firm was a sufficient guarantee of their good faith, I felt it necessary to be guarded in my reply, lest their client might be the very man who had paid old Peter to do away with Psyche. Of

all persons in the world he would be most anxious to get her into his hands. After some consideration I replied as follows :

'The girl in question, presumably under the influence of a narcotic, was enclosed in a chest, and the chest was given by an unknown man to a notorious scoundrel living in Bonport to be taken out at night into the open sea and thrown overboard.

'The chest was opened, and the child, showing signs of life, was carried to shore, and there has since been kept in confinement by the rascal employed to sink the chest. She was discovered and removed to a place of safety by me. I cannot leave this neighbourhood, but if you make an appointment to meet me in Towerbridge any day between eleven and four, I shall be happy to answer further questions upon this subject.

' BERNARD THORNE,

' c/o Mrs. Benham,

' Toll House Cottage,

' Old London Road,

' Ecclesham.'

I expected a reply to my letter the next day, but none came; another day passed without any letter being slipped under the door, and, then concluding that the postman had not thought it worth while to deliver it, believing the house to be empty, I resolved to go over to Towerbridge and make inquiries the following afternoon, if nothing came in the interval.

I waited until three—the latest hour at which the second mail was delivered at The Chase, and then, assured that Psyche slept, I locked the doors and started for Towerbridge. About four I reached the post-office. The packet of returned letters was examined, and none being found addressed to me, I telegraphed to the solicitors for an explanation of their silence, telling them to reply to me at the post-office. Nearly an hour elapsed before their answer came.

‘Regret delay,’ their telegram said; ‘client not yet replied to our letter. We now wire him for instructions. Please await at office our next telegram.’

It was hopeless to expect the next telegram for at least an hour, and tired of waiting in the dismal office, I went out and strolled round the town, picking up one or two things that I thought would please Psyche. At six o'clock I returned to the post-office ; nothing had yet come in. I began to feel anxious about Psyche. It was nearly an hour's walk home. At seven it would be getting dark, and she would rise, and finding me not there, might be frightened. Should I go back now, and return for the message early the next morning ? While I was debating this question the signal-bell jingled.

'Is that for me ?' I asked the clerk, as he began to read from the instrument.

'Yes, sir,' he replied, after a minute's silence.

It was a long message ; at last it was handed to me.

'Our client replies us as follows,' I read :
'"Absent from home since last writing you. Bernard Thorne's discovery not the slightest

connection with my loss. A blur in the advertisement led me to read 1887 for 1877 —the date at which my daughter left her home. Make any arrangement you think just to compensate Mr. Thorne for inconvenience, etc., incurred by my mistake."

'Then all this correspondence has ended in nothing,' thought I ; and so I continued to think until, in the slums through which I had to pass in quitting Towerbridge, by the old road, I caught sight of old Peter, my great-grandfather.

CHAPTER XVIII

THERE was a beerhouse at the corner of the street with a low bow-fronted window, from which old Peter must have seen me coming. He lurched out into the middle of the road, and stood there waiting for me like nothing so much as a great chimpanzee waiting an incentive to attack. His back was bent with age, so that his leathery hands with their crooked and gnarled fingers hung below his knees, and to look up at me his head was well thrown back. Summer and winter he wore a pea-jacket with a guernsey underneath, and a fur cap which spread his ears outward and covered his forehead, meeting the ragged brows that beetled over his deep-set, fierce and vicious black eyes. His skin was the colour of an

old tanned sail. Between his protruding cheekbones and lower jaw his cheeks fell in, and his great beak of a nose almost touched his bristled, underhung chin. His legs were bowed and he stood with his feet well apart; altogether he was the oddest specimen of humanity you could wish to meet, and quite the most unpleasant.

His attitude was openly defiant, and seemed to say, ‘Here am I, and I’m not afraid of you. What have you got to say to me?’

I was not disposed to say anything to him. That was not the place to bring him to account for his misdeeds. I was anxious to get back to the cottage. His presence alarmed me for the safety of Psyche; for it was clear that her escape was no longer a secret from old Peter, who, I could not doubt, had followed me into the town and had lain in wait for my return. He stood directly in front of me: when I moved towards the footpath he shifted his position to confront me and provoke encounter.

'Mind he don't bite ye, sir,' said a man at the beerhouse door, grinning.

I brushed past old Peter, and, regaining the middle of the road, pursued my course. He overtook and kept pace with me, swinging along a couple of feet from my side with a queer plantigrade gait, setting his long foot flat on the ground and rolling his bent body from side to side. My pace was about four miles an hour, but he kept up with me in a surprising manner, his features set in an expression of dogged determination. Neither of us spoke a word till we were clear of the town and out in the lonely road ; then, seeing that his purpose was to dog me home, and that I must shake him off by some means, I stopped. He stopped as well.

'What do you mean by this?' I asked.

'What do I mean, you varmint!' he answered. 'Why, I mean to do what I like. I've as good right to walk along this road and stop where I choose as you 'ave. If you think you can prevent me, have a try!' He slipped his hand in the pocket of

his pea-jacket and brought out an open knife.

'Have a try,' he repeated; 'and I'll run this into your liver in self-defence. I'm ninety-four, but I'm wuth a dozen such scurvy pups as you. Have a try! You'd ruther not. You're got no fight in you. You're only a slinking thief. You're afeared on me, ain't ye? You would like to call a policeman to help you, wouldn't ye? Why ain't ye set the policemen on to me? Because you've got more reason to fear 'em 'an what I 'ave. I ain't robbed you, but you're robbed me. I don't want no one to help me; I'm just going to do this business myself. I'm goin' to hunt you down, and when I've found where you're stowed away that gal, I'm going to get her, dead or alive. Now you know. Do what you like; but say your prayers afore you try to prevent me.'

To old Peter's disgust, I tacitly declined to be drawn into a fight or even a wordy dispute. The distance to the cottage was over three miles, and it seemed to me that,

extraordinary as the old man's physical powers were, he could not keep up to my pace for more than half that distance, and that I might leave him out of sight by the time I reached the bend of The Chase park ; and this being the best plan of defeating him that presented itself to my mind, I started afresh, increasing my pace as I went. The old man, with his bear-like gait, kept by my side, and lost not an inch of ground for the first mile, with no visible sign of exhaustion ; and it became evident that I must increase our distance to succeed in tiring him out. I determined to strike away from the main road and make for the village of Eccleshall, whence I could return by a footpath over the downs to the old London road, doubling the distance to the cottage : and so on coming to the by-road, I turned off sharp. The pace tried me, but still with indomitable pertinacity old Peter stuck to my side. We came in sight of the village, and here I saw that I must make a vigorous effort to outstrip the dreadful old man, for if, on getting through the

village, he found me doubling to regain the old road, he would at once conclude that Psyche was there, and that I had simply gone out of my way to mislead him.

There was a pretty steep hill before us ; I put on a spurt. Old Peter kept up with me for a hundred yards, and then stopped as if his strength had suddenly given way.

‘You think you’ve done me, do you, ye runnin’ varmen !’ he gasped. ‘Don’t make no mistake. Old Peter takes more beatin’ than you can give him.’

He had disappeared from the road when I turned round on the brow of the hill and looked back. I was fairly exhausted, and sank down by the roadside, whence I commanded a view of the hill, to recover my breath and strength, with the satisfactory reflection that somewhere in the copse below old Peter was also panting for breath.

As soon as I was somewhat relieved I rose, cut through the village, and took the path through the cornfields. The sun had

already sunk, and the first star twinkled in the sky overhead.

Judging by my own fatigue, I reckoned that old Peter would certainly give up the pursuit for to-day, and that his first move on leaving the copse would be to find an ale-house in Eccleshall where he could take a long drink and a long rest at the same time ; nevertheless, the uncomfortable apprehension that he had returned to the old road, where I might again encounter him, hurried me on.

The lingering twilight was not yet past when I reached the cottage, and to my great satisfaction I could see no one on the road in either direction. I unlocked the door and, entering, closed it behind me.

'We are safe at least for another night,' thought I. Then I called 'Psyche !' There was no response. It was unusual. At the first sound of my footfall at this hour she would cry to me, 'Brother !'

Going down the passage towards the stairs, I stopped abruptly at the angle facing the entrance to the back garden : the door was

wide open. It was easily accounted for, I said to myself—Psyche, rising at the usual hour, and finding me not in the house, had unbolted the door, and gone out to seek me in the garden. That was why she had not responded to my call. But for all that it was with growing fear that I ran down the garden, calling her under my breath at every turn and alley, peering into all her favourite haunts with the hope that she might be hiding from me in sport, as she sometimes did. Not a sound broke the silence : I could see no sign of her.

I ran back into the house, and searched every room, calling upon her again and again with despair in my voice that told me how dear she had become to me. Once more I explored the garden with ever-fading hope, and coming at last to the wicket at the side of the house which communicated with the front garden, I found that open.

Then it occurred to me that old Peter had beaten me, and not I him. It was obvious now why he had stopped me in the open

street at Towerbridge and tried to provoke me to a quarrel ; why, when he saw me resolved on going through Eccleshall, he allowed me to struggle alone up the hill. He had succeeded only too well in gaining time for my grandfather or some other rascally accomplice to lure Psyche out of the cottage and make away with her. And while I wasted precious moments on the hill in the complacent delusion that he was resting in the copse, my untiring enemy was plodding back by the shorter road to lend a hand, and with that ruthless hand might have stifled the poor child's cries for help. It seemed to me that I was something worse than a fool to have overlooked a device so palpable.

CHAPTER XIX.

My first impulse was to make at once for the Half-way House, on the chance of finding Psyche there ; but a moment's reflection convinced me that those who had the cunning to devise this scheme of abduction would never have the folly to carry the girl to a place where she would certainly be sought. They would never dare again to bury her in the caves. Would it not be better, I asked myself, to go at once to Bonport, whither she would more probably be taken, and set the police to search for her ?

As I stood irresolute by the open wicket I heard the sound of a heavy slouching step upon the road ; I had listened too recently to that peculiar step to be mistaken. It was old Peter ; one part of my last hypothesis

was faulty : he had not trudged back to lend a hand in carrying Psyche away. And, what was more, it looked as if he doubted the success of that enterprise ; for, coming in front of the house, he stopped and cast his eye on the door and the upper windows, scratching his stubby jaw with his hooked fingers in dubitation.

Standing by the wicket at the side of the house, a shrub screened me, and a fir in the front garden threw a deeper shadow on the narrow path. I scarcely breathed. He moved on slowly, and presently the rustling of corn told me that he had turned into the field and was skirting the holly hedge. Stepping lightly along the garden path, I followed the rustling of the corn till it stopped. Then I heard him parting the holly with the purpose of getting a clear view of the garden. He spent a few minutes in this endeavour, and then, giving it up with a growled curse, he retraced his steps and got into the road. Once more that heavy flat-footed step sounded upon the road, and as it

receded I made up my mind to follow, concluding that he would make at once for the rendezvous where Psyche had been taken.

I watched him from the garden until the squat, rolling figure was only just perceptible in the rapidly fading twilight, and then followed, keeping on the turf beside the standing corn. He plodded steadily along the road for about a quarter of a mile, slowly enough now, and then, turning to the side, he disappeared and his steps became inaudible. Doubtful whether he had taken a path through the cornfield, or was standing still to make sure that he was not being followed, I redoubled the caution with which I stole onward. A grunt close at hand stopped me, and I dimly perceived the old man stretched out on the turf not more than half a dozen paces from me. He kicked off one boot and then the other, muttering curses all the while upon me, and the blisters on his feet, and things in general.

I was puzzled; not a word of exultation or

triumph brightened up his monologue, such as a man in such sore condition would have tried to console himself with. Was I at fault again? Had I jumped to the wrong conclusion? After all, might I have overlooked Psyche in some nook or corner of the garden? While these questions were running through my mind old Peter had rolled over, and, making a pillow of his arms, laid his head upon them with a grunt. The next grunt terminated in a snore.

His heavy boots lay temptingly between his blistered feet and me; the means of checking pursuit by him lay almost within reach. I crept forward, picked them up, and, retreating cautiously, hurled the trophy into the midst of the corn when I was a hundred yards back on my way to the cottage.

At the gate I heard the distant murmur of a voice, and passing quickly through the alley at the side of the house, I saw Psyche in the garden-seat facing the lawn, but to my utter astonishment Miss Duncan was seated beside her.

'He is here! come back to me, my brother!' cried Psyche, as she sprang to her feet and ran to meet me.

Miss Duncan, recognising me as I approached, seemed even more amazed than I by this unlooked-for meeting.

What had happened? Simply this: Psyche, as I imagined, finding me not in the house, had sought me in the garden, and thence, extending her search, had wandered along the road. The park gates, which she had seen shut when we passed in the night were wide, open. Who could have opened them but I, who did everything? She passed through, and was found in the avenue by Miss Duncan, looking in the twilight like a spirit, with her pale face, her large dark eyes, and their expression of childlike fearlessness.

I can best tell what followed as Ethel described it to me this morning:

'After the first shock—for indeed I was frightened at first, her silence and the vague way in which she looked about her, after regarding me for a few moments, giving

additional weirdness to her spiritual appearance—I summoned up courage to falter : “Who are you ?”

““ I am Psyche,” she answered, with sweet, slow articulation.

““ Psyche—is that your only name ?”

““ Yes. Why should I have two names ? I am only one—Psyche—that is all.”

‘ Her strange answer seemed in character with her ethereal nature. There was nothing in her dress unreal, and surely nothing in her manner to make me fear the gentle creature, and so, gathering my wits together a little, I said :

““ Do you want to see anyone up in the house, dear ?”

““ No ; I am looking for my brother. He has gone away from me ; but he will come back, because he knows I could not live without him. He has only gone away to look at the great world—to see the sky touch the sea, and the clouds lie on the hills. Do you know, I think he loves the great world better than I do, that is why he did not take me.

That is so strange to me—a world without walls—because it is so new to me."

"How long have you been here, dear?"

"Only some nights—I cannot count. Not many."

"And where have you come from?"

"I came from the caves where I have lived always—the caves under the sea. My brother found me there, and brought me away when the sea went down."

"Who is your brother?"

Psyche rubbed her hands caressingly and her face lit up with a beautiful smile.

"I will tell you about my brother," she said. "I think about him always. I should like to talk about him. You are the first person I have ever talked to except him."

There was a seat at the border of the drive : I led her to it, and we sat down side by side. I slipped my hand under her arm, and almost with surprise found she was warm and human. She lifted my hand and caressed it with her cheek, and I could see

she was thinking of her brother. "Tell me about him," I said.

"He is everything to me. All that I see and hear is lovely: the stars and the swallows and the little golden caw; the flowers and the moths; this dress and my shoes—all make me happy. But I could do without them all. I should be just as happy in the cave, with my eyes shut and not a sound, if only I could feel my brother's hand in mine. Have you got a brother?"

"No, dear."

"Poor one, poor soul!" said she in tender pity. "You do not know what it is to be happy. But you will when a brother comes to find you. I think we must all have brothers, though we can't know it till they come to us. Long—long—long years—longer than I can recollect—I had no brother and my life was nothing; but since he has come to me it has been all joy."

"When did he find you, dear?"

"Not long—not long, when I think of the days that went before. Ah, they were long,

those days when I saw nothing but the rocks and sand, and had no friend but my black caw ; when I heard no sound but his voice and the whistle up above when my food was sent down, and my own voice when I sang. Sometimes I slept because I did not know what to do ; and sometimes I cried because I could not sleep. I wanted to sleep for ever. So these days seemed very long, and since then the nights have been too short. For I cannot see in the day, you know, like my brother, and he sleeps when the sun shines that he may be with me in the night."

" You cannot see in the day ? "

" No, because always I lived in the dark. There is no light in the caves. But I can bear the light better and better every day. I can wait till the blue flowers have untwisted, and the big bees push their way in. My brother tells me their names, and tells me all about them. He taught me to speak. I could not say a word when he first came to me ; I could not understand what he said. I knew nothing but what I thought.

But he taught me patiently till I could understand what he said and make him understand me. Then I wanted no more in the cave but just to sit and listen to all he said about the world ; but now, when there is so much to understand, I talk a great deal. But still the greatest happiness is to sit by his side and listen to his voice."

" "Were you long together in the cave ?"

" "Only a little while; but when I remember how many times we went down into the wet sand under the rock, making the hole that let us out into this world, and how many marks my brother cut in the wall to show the days we had worked, I think it must have been a long while. I must look for him," she said, rising abruptly. " I want him ! Oh, I want my brother ! Where is he ?"

" "Can you tell me where you live now, dear ?"

" "Yes, I will show you. It is quite near. Come with me, and when we find him you shall hear him speak, you shall look at him, and know what it is to have a brother." "

Ethel suffered herself to be guided—Psyche taking her hand—out into the road and along it to the Toll-house Cottage. She knew that Mrs. Benham lived there, and that I had lodged there; but she had heard nothing of my old landlady's going, and believed that I was in America, for her father had not spoken to her of our meeting.

As Psyche led the way without hesitation through the side wicket into the garden, she conceived that the poor girl was a patient placed under the charge of the old lady, and that her malady was a form of mental hallucination. If that were the case, it was her duty to restore Psyche to her guardian, and she willingly helped to look for that 'brother,' who, she thought, existed only in the girl's romantic imagination. When they found no one in the house or in the garden, she concluded that Mrs. Benham had been called away, and, though it was getting late, she resolved to stay with Psyche until her return.

Psyche grew apprehensive and silent; but

her new friend soothed her by assuring her that the brother would soon return, and led her on to talk about the past. Psyche could go no further back in her history than the eventless life in the cave, for that destroying monotony had obliterated all memories of the period before her illness. Ethel was struck by the consistent thread of the wonderful story : nothing was contradictory. Psyche never wandered from the subject except to wonder where I was. ‘ He *will* come back to me ! ’ she repeated with pathetic insistence.

‘ He must, dear. He would not leave you, knowing how you love him,’ Ethel replied. Yet still she doubted if that brother existed until I came in sight, and Psyche cried : ‘ He is here—come here to me—my brother ! ’ Then her wonder increased.

‘ Psyche has told me the strangest story,’ she said; ‘ can it be true ? ’

‘ It must be true,’ I answered, ‘ for she has not yet learned what falsehood means.’

‘ And you are that brother whose love has given her life ? ’

‘Yes, in the wide sense that those are brothers whose love is brotherly.’

Ethel put her hand into mine, and as she turned in gentle sympathy to Psyche, a star lit the tear that fell from her cheek.

CHAPTER XX.

A SERVANT from the house crossed the road as we came to the gate.

'Sir Henry has come home, miss, and has sent out to find you,' he said.

Ethel kissed Psyche, promising to see her again and often, and left us. We returned to the garden.

Psyche was unusually quiet. The objects which before had excited her interest were passed now unnoticed.

'I am tired,' she said—'I have walked so much. I want to feel that you have come back to me again.'

We sat down in the garden-seat, and, nestling against my arm, she said:

'Tell me about that other one, and let me only listen.'

Ethel was a pleasant subject to talk about, and I told all I knew about her, letting my tongue run on thoughtlessly and with a lover's enthusiasm—forgetting that Psyche loved me and was neither a child nor an elf, but had a woman's heart and a woman's susceptibility.

For a long while she listened, sitting as quiet as a mouse; then she took her hand from my arm and drew herself away from me a little distance. I checked myself abruptly, seeing that I had awakened her jealousy and pained her by my folly. It might be only the jealousy of a child, but I saw by the expression on her downcast face that she suffered. And now it occurred to me whether, having gone so far, I ought not to go farther and prepare her for the separation that must come if I married Ethel. She knew nothing of my hopes in that direction, for marriage was a subject I had studiously avoided; yet I felt that she ought to know. But before I could make up my mind to undertake the cruel task, she had come back to my side

again, and was nestling her cheek against my shoulder.

'Do not tell me any more about her,' she murmured. 'It gives me a pain here,' pressing her hand upon her breast, 'and makes me feel as if you were no more my brother. I cannot bear to hear that she is so much to you, because it makes me think that I must be nothing, and I feel as if sharp rocks were running into me. But though you have known her so long, you have never lived in the same cave with her, and she has never worked with you, scraping the sand away with her hand, and fighting to get away from the water when it came in and stopped the hole. And, after all, you are not her brother as you are mine, are you, dear ?'

'No ; that is true, Psyche ;' and thinking that perhaps Ethel might never be mine, I resolved to be silent about it for the present.

'You will teach me to dance and sing ?' Psyche continued coaxingly. 'Not a foolish song like mine, but one with words like those

you sing. And you will buy me something to wear on my head like hers, and teach me how to wear my hair so that it may not be seen.'

'Yes, Psyche, all in good time.'

'Yes, all in good time, dear,' she echoed.
'She called me "dear": it's a pretty word, isn't it?'

There was a tear running down her white cheek, but her voice quivered with joy in this reconciliation and spring of hope.

* * * * *

It was about two hours after the departure of Ethel that Psyche and I, then at the bottom of the garden (where she had discovered a glow-worm, and was marvelling over the little insect who carried a star with him), were startled by hearing a knock at the front door. It was a feeble knock, but distinct enough in the night silence. It was nearly eleven o'clock. Who would call at such an hour? Clearly no one to see Mrs. Benham. My suspicions pointed rather to a visit from old Peter, who on some pretext had come to assure himself as to my being an inmate.

'Someone has come to the house,' I said to Psyche as the knock was repeated. 'I must go and see who it is. Stay here.'

'Yes, I will not go away again. You will find me here when you come back.'

I went up to the house, and, passing by the side, peered cautiously into the front garden. A man was standing by the door : it was Sir Henry Duncan.

He came towards me, holding out his hand, when I showed myself.

I was too surprised to speak, but I took his hand. It was moist and cold, and trembled palpably as he put it into mine. For a moment he was silent ; then he spoke in a quick, unsteady voice :

'It is not the first time I have had to apologize to you, Mr. Thorne,' he said. 'You know my weaknesses too well to require an explanation. A weak man—a weak man led by uncontrollable impulses into actions that entail mortification and regret. My daughter Ethel has told me a story so strange'—he hesitated, passed his hand over

his brow, and then clasped the lattice—‘so strange that it would pass belief if it were not supported by something you told me when we last met. The story of a young girl ;’ his voice sank so low that the last word was hardly audible. ‘Can I sit down ? I feel faint.’

I led him through into the back garden, and as he took a seat his eyes wandered in every direction.

‘A feeble heart—the slightest emotion upsets me,’ he explained. ‘You have seen that in the past.’

I offered to fetch some water, knowing that he never drank anything stronger. He declined, still looking from side to side furtively.

‘I am better ; it is gone,’ he said, though his voice belied him. ‘I was saying—Mr. Thorne—I came to apologize to you. When you told me of having found a treasure I treated it as the statement of a madman. Now I know you have been confined in those caves, and what has happened there,

anything is possible. I know something of the history of those caves—the landslip that closed them, and so on. I intended, after hearing the strange story from Ethel, to call upon you to-morrow; but I found it impossible to rest with this—this on my mind!

It seemed to me that here was much ado about nothing; but his character had always been so incomprehensible to me that I was scarcely surprised by this unnecessary act of self-humiliation.

'I had another motive in coming here,' he continued after a pause. 'From what Ethel told me, I thought that possibly I might be able to render you some assistance.'

'Assistance?' I said questioningly.

'Perhaps the version of the story that Ethel gave me, which she, I believe, learnt from the poor girl who calls herself Psyche, is misleading. May I ask you to tell me what really has happened?'

He spoke less coherently than I have written, with frequent hesitation and correc-

tions, being still under the influence of powerful emotion.

I saw no reason for withholding the facts from him, and I told him briefly how I had found Psyche, and how we had escaped. He did not interrupt my narrative by a word, but sat with his eyes set on me as if he were transfixed. Only when I dwelt on the awful solitude of the caves, the dark prison in which Psyche had passed her youth, he drew his handkerchief out as if to wipe his face, and, forgetting his purpose, sat fingering it as the dying finger the sheet of their deathbed.

‘And did she preserve her reason in this living death?’ he asked hoarsely when I ceased to speak.

‘Yes. She is like one who is beginning to live, that is all.’

At that moment he started to his feet. Psyche was on the lawn, her figure revealed by the light dress against the dark evergreens. She stood motionless, looking at him for a minute, and then with a cry of fear that I had never heard before from her, she

ran to my side for protection, gazing across me at him with terror.

‘ You don’t know me ! ’ he gasped, looking not less terrified than she.

‘ Wasn’t it you who put your arm through the hedge, with a knife to cut me ? ’ she asked.

‘ What does she mean ? ’ he asked, speaking to me quickly in French.

I could not tell.

‘ No, no,’ said Psyche in a calmer tone, ‘ it was not you. Your hand is white and thin and long ; that one was like the roots of a hedge.’

‘ Do you understand ? ’ Sir Henry asked me in a low tone of pity, that showed he doubted her sanity. I answered him in French, as he spoke to me, that Psyche might not comprehend.

‘ Yes ; I understand it well enough,’ I said. ‘ I know that hand. He knows she is here, and passed along the hedge not three hours ago.’

‘ He—who ? ’ he asked sharply.

‘Peter Beamish.’

He started as if he had been struck, and as if the blow had roused his courage he said to Psyche, with a firmness of voice and manner contrasting sharply with his previous nerveless utterance :

‘That hand shall not frighten you again, my child’—then to me, as he turned to leave the garden, he added : ‘I will return when I have got that wretch out of the way.’

We heard him passing between the corn and the garden hedge. Trying to conceal my uneasiness, I waited anxiously for the result. Old Peter, I knew, was not one to be frightened away by the rustling corn ; he would wait down there, knife in hand, for whoever might come. If I had heard a death cry from Sir Henry it would have been no more than I expected. No such cry came, yet I fancied I heard old Peter’s growling voice. Half an hour passed, and Sir Henry had not returned.

When I proposed to Psyche that we

should go and look at the glow-worm she assented at once.

‘ You are not afraid now ?’ I asked.

She laughed.

‘ I could not fear anything when you are with me,’ she said.

We were at the bottom of the garden when I heard the distant crack of a shot sounding as if it came from the park.

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR HENRY did not return that night, as he had promised. I could not conceive of old Peter carrying such a contemptibly insignificant-looking weapon as a modern revolver, otherwise I might have feared that the shot I heard had been fired by him, and that Sir Henry was hit. I attributed the shot rather to poachers in Sir Henry's preserves, and his absence to the pursuit of them. All doubt of his safety was removed by his coming over to the cottage the following morning, soon after Psyche had gone up to her room for the day.

He was quite self-possessed ; his manner, indeed, was almost apathetic as he gave me his hand and then dropped into the seat on the lawn ; the only trace of that agitation which had unmanned him the previous night

was in the haggard, worn and old expression of his face : he looked like a gambler who has played long and lost all.

'There was a shot in the park last night,' he began. 'You may have heard it. I thought my daughter might be alarmed, and so went in. Quite as well, you will say, seeing that I was no more fit to be at large than a maniac. She knew what was the matter with me, and brought me round as only she can ;' he repeated slowly, 'as only she can. One of these days, Mr. Thorne, you may know the value of my daughter Ethel ; then, should you be threatened with the loss of her, you will understand my feeling. Fancy if a man came insolently to you and said he loved your wife, and meant to take her from you if he could, how would you feel towards that man ? and if, in addition to that, your wife admitted the possibility of being taken from you, how would you feel towards the whole world ?'

'You are speaking now of the love of a man for his wife.'

'Well,' he returned sharply, 'may not the love of a father for his daughter be as deep and strong as that of a husband for his wife? The love I bore her mother is centred in my daughter—all the love of my heart.'

He turned his back upon me for a moment, then, glancing round the garden, he asked :

'Where is she—that other unloved soul ?'

I explained how she slept during the day, being unable to endure the light after living so long in darkness.

'Twelve years without light or love,' he said, visibly moved. 'A month would kill me. She loves you, Ethel tells me.'

'That is only natural, as she knows none but me.'

'It never occurred to you that she might be your wife ?'

'How could it occur to me, loving your daughter as I do ?'

He knitted his brows as he buried his face in his hands, his elbows resting on his knee.

Raising his head after a minute's silence, he said :

'It isn't right that the girl should live here alone with you. I am not speaking from any conventional considerations of propriety, but with respect to the girl's future. You are strengthening the tie of affection which presently is to be snapped. You ought to weaken it, that when the shock comes it may not break her heart.'

'I hope to find her family or friends; until then she must stay with me.'

'Not necessarily,' he said, his eye brightening. 'Let her come to us. Ethel is deeply interested in her. Let her dangerous affection for you be replaced by a sister's love.'

'With all my heart! I can wish Psyche no greater happiness than to live with your daughter.'

'It would be a healthier life for her,' he continued, with growing excitement. 'She would get to know the world she is to live in. We could take her abroad *while you are finding her friends.*'

He looked eagerly into my eyes as he made this proposition. There was a wonderful change in the expression of his face; apathy had changed to keen interest. It was still a gambler's face, but it wore the look of one who sees his way to retrieve a fortune by plucking a pigeon. For the first time a doubt of his honesty rose in my mind. I believe he saw it, for his eye quailed before mine, and he rose, muttering something in a deep, self-deprecating tone that I could not catch. He passed across the lawn with his head bent, and when he returned the evil look was gone from his face. As he seated himself again beside me, he said :

' It wouldn't do, Thorne; I understand and sympathize with the girl's feelings more than you can believe. She must not lose you at once like that. What have you done towards finding her family ? '

I told him of the advertisement I had published, and the answer I received.

' You had no other answer ? ' he asked.

' No.'

'And what do you propose to do now?'

'Advertise again—if I find no further notice taken of the last advertisement. There may be a letter at the post-office now. I shall go over to-day and see.'

'It's not unlikely. Some sharp lawyer may see his way to making money through it. The man who got rid of the child would be only too glad, one may suppose, to claim her and put her out of the way more securely. Have you thought of that?'

'Yes; I am not certain that I have not already played into the hands of that man or his agents.'

'I dare say you have,' he replied calmly. 'At any rate, you see the danger of advertising in that way. It would be far safer to put the affair into the hands of a good solicitor—do you know one?'

'Only your solicitor, Mr. Andrews, at Bonport.'

'A good man, but not at all suited to an investigation of this kind. You had better leave it to me. I will see Andrews and ask

him who is the best man in the profession to employ, if you like.'

I accepted the offer at once.

'Then you will take no further steps at present.'

'I shall be very happy to leave it entirely in your hands.'

'Good'—he seemed pleased with my renewed confidence in him. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, looking on the ground. After a moment's pause, without raising his head, he said :

'Someone will be going up from the house to Towerbridge in the course of the morning; shall he inquire at the post-office if there is any letter for you ?'

I assented to this, giving him the name to which answers were to be addressed.

'Very well; that is settled,' he said, drawing a long breath and rising to his feet. 'Let us walk. There is something else I want to say to you.'

We walked up and down the lawn. When we had made a couple of turns, he said :

'You told me you had found some sort of treasure in those caves. What do you value it at?'

'Roughly, I think about ten thousand pounds.'

'More or less. The caves and the cottage on the cliff are your property.'

'Yes.'

'If I give you a cheque for twenty thousand pounds, will you let me have the freehold and full possession of all that is to be found in the caves? Remember, you may have found but part of the treasure.'

'You are welcome to the rest.'

'Then that is a bargain, and I may take possession as soon as I please after paying?'

'Certainly.'

'Why did you hesitate?'

'Because your offer seemed too generous.'

'It is not generous. I want those caves, and I would have paid twice as much to get them.'

'My grandfather inhabits the cottage,' I said.

'I know he does. He may live there as long as he pleases. I will arrange with him.'

We took another turn in silence, for his strange contradictory behaviour bewildered me. Opposite the wicket he stopped.

'That is all I have to say now,' he said. 'Come over this evening; that cheque shall be ready for you. Bring Psyche with you. There is no time to lose.'

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN the sun had set we went to The Chase, Psyche and I, she agreeing to pay this visit far more readily than I anticipated.

'Shall you be glad to see Ethel?' I asked, the wish prompting the question.

'Yes,' she answered, nodding her head. 'There is so much I want to ask her that I can't ask you, so much I want to learn. I can't talk much to you, because I don't know enough words, and sometimes I say the wrong one, and it makes you laugh and shows me how foolish I am. But I think a great deal when my eyes are shut.'

'Can you tell me what you think?'

'So many things! I think how beautiful it is to sit and listen to you speak, and I think if I could learn more words I could

talk to you and make you happy, just as you make me happy. Sometimes I think I am no more than the little creatures in the garden, that we forget the next day because they cannot tell us what they think and feel. And I want to be something more than that.' There was a pathetic vibration in her voice as it sank in this last phrase; then in a firmer tone she added: 'So I want to see all that Ethel can do, and learn how to do it very soon—very soon.'

We met Ethel and her father in the drive, and walked together through the flower-garden and the conservatories, there being still light enough to reveal the tints of the blooms even to ordinary eyes. Under his daughter's influence Sir Henry was always reasonable, and at most times amiable and interesting; but this evening I was struck by the tender interest he took in Psyche. He devoted himself almost exclusively to her, and betrayed no symptom of jealousy or suspicion when Ethel and I lingered in the

room. The manner of this extraordinary man was now as opposed to his abrupt behaviour in the morning as that to the quaking agitation of the night before. Selecting some of the blossoms that Psyche most admired, he arranged them with taste in a spray, gossiping at the same time in a simple way that she could understand, and fastened it upon her dress. Psyche was delighted, pointing out to me that it was like the spray that Ethel wore.

'I had no idea the girl was so intelligent,' he said to me, when Psyche had drawn Ethel away with the serious view she had in mind. 'And how exceedingly sweet her manner is!'

I repeated what Psyche had said in coming.

'That wish of hers would be terribly pathetic if it were impossible to realize it,' he answered. 'But, thank God, it may be realized. She shall learn all that she wishes to know. I will adopt her as my own daughter.'

'If her real parents are not found,' I suggested.

'True. But I do not think they will be found,' he said in an odd, dry tone. 'By-the-bye, there was no letter for you at Towerbridge. I saw Andrews this afternoon, and put the case hypothetically before him. He is distinctly of opinion that, so far as the girl's welfare is concerned, the best thing to be done is to do nothing. The great thing to be feared is that the man who put her out of the way twelve years ago will get her into his hands again in order to put her away effectually and for ever. There can be no doubt that the crime was attempted with a mercenary motive—the child coming between this man and a fortune. If that was so, Psyche is still the rightful heiress, and more dangerous to the man now than she was as a child. At any rate, it would be most unwise to do anything in a hurry. There is no necessity for haste. I intend, with the blessing of heaven,' he murmured fervently, 'to repair the wrong that

has been done to that poor child, and to be to her a better friend than those who suffered her to be carried away.'

There was an awkward pause. I could not account satisfactorily to myself for the feeling of embarrassment that made me silent.

'You can't make it out?' said Sir Henry, observing my silence. 'That does not surprise me. To you it must seem that my conduct has been that of a maniac rather than a sane man, and nothing must appear more mad than my proposal to adopt as my daughter a girl I saw for the first time last night. Every effect is inexplicable until the cause that produced it stands revealed. My quickly-changing moods are inexplicable. Believe me, not one of those moods would appear more unaccountable than the phases in an eclipse if you knew of the shadow cast upon my life. That shadow is nearly past, thank God! One of these days—not now—you shall know all.'

As he spoke the last words he opened his

notebook, took out a folded slip of paper, and put it in my hand.

'That is the cheque for the property you were good enough to let me have,' he said in a tone of real gratitude. 'With it, Bernard, I give you permission to ask my daughter to be your wife.'

This was as unexpected as anything he had yet said or done, his tone betraying none of that bitter sense of deprivation he had before displayed.

'In giving you my daughter,' he continued, 'you may perhaps find some reason for my eager desire to adopt Psyche.'

If I had not been blinded by a lover's emotion I might have found another reason, and seen that I was taking a bribe.

We found poor Psyche in the library looking with pained wonder at an open book, and striving to understand that each collection of black marks meant a word, and that these words, taken together, told of something that people wanted to know. From the book

she looked round the room at the shelves, from floor to ceiling, filled with similar books.

'Are they all the same?' she asked.

'No; see, this is quite different,' replied Ethel, opening another, and telling her the story it contained in a few easy words. But the story failed to charm Psyche, for she had a very serious object in making these inquiries.

'Can you read them all—all these little words in all these books?' she asked in awe.

'Yes, Ethel can read them all, and so will you be able to read them one of these days,' said Sir Henry kindly.

Psyche drew a long breath in silence. Then turning to Ethel, she said :

'Now I want to hear you sing—a song with words.'

Ethel took her into the drawing-room, and, sitting down to the piano, sang a simple ballad to her own accompaniment.

'Oh, that is beautiful!' said Psyche, after listening in rapt attention. 'I want to hear it again; let me do it.' And seating herself

before the piano, she pressed the notes as she had seen Ethel press them ; but when nothing but discord came from her touch she drew back frightened, and looked round to see if we were laughing at her folly. But the poor child's ignorance and dismay moved us in another way.

' You will have to learn a long while, dear, before you can play,' said Ethel, sitting down beside her, and taking her hand ; ' I have been learning since I was quite a little child.'

When we left the house the stars were out.

' Look, look !' cried Psyche, lifting Ethel's hand in delight ; ' see, she wears dewdrops on her fingers !'

At a word from her father, Ethel took the diamond ring off, and slipped it on Psyche's finger.

' It's a dewdrop that doesn't fade, and that you can keep for ever,' she said ; ' and you shall wear it always, dear, for my sake.'

As Psyche sat by my side in the night she held up the ring, and looked at the glancing rays wistfully.

'Brother,' she said, 'it does not look so lovely on my hand as it did on hers. My fingers are not so smooth and white as hers.'

'Working in the sand has spoiled them. That's all over now.'

'Yes; we shall work side by side no more.'

Presently she looked at the ring again.

'Oh, it was kind of her to give it to me!' she said, pressing the ring to her cheek. 'She is all kind and good, and sweet, and beautiful. You don't know anyone in all the world more beautiful and good, do you?'

'No, Psyche.'

'I don't think there ever will be one like her,' she said in a quiet tone of conviction.

'Why, I thought you were going to be like her,' I said lightly, hoping to change the vein of sadness in which her thoughts seemed to be running. But the pleasantry was unperceived.

'No,' said she, shaking her head gravely; 'I can never be like her. I was silly and vain to think that. I know better now. I could never learn all those words—never

sing as she does ; for she has been learning since she was a little child—all the time I have been living in the dark. I shall never be anything but a silent little creature of the garden.' Her voice trembled. 'Talk to me, dear, just a little more, and let me listen as I did in the cave when you first came to me and I knew nothing. Oh, it was good to know nothing then ; it is dreadful to know so little now ! My heart is very full. I cannot speak.'

My heart was full also, but I managed to speak cheerfully as I reasoned with her, showing that our happiness did not depend upon our excelling all others, or there could be but one happy person in the whole world ; that no two persons are alike, but each has some excellence which the other may lack without being less lovable ; and other truisms of a like kind.

Whether she followed my arguments or understood them, I cannot tell. Perhaps it was only the sound of my voice she heard, while her thoughts were occupied with pleasant

memories. But she seemed comforted, now and again smoothing my shoulder gently with her cheek, as she did when she was happy.

I thought I might take advantage of this mood, to prepare her for the coming change, so I spoke of our visit to The Chase, and the things we had seen. It pleased her to talk about the greenhouses and the gorgeous flowers in them.

'But it was so strange,' she said in a tone of awe.

'It will seem less strange and more beautiful when you know them better.'

'Are we going there again?' she asked shyly.

'We are going there to dine to-morrow evening. You will like to go?'

'Wherever you go I must like to go.'

'You don't dislike Sir Henry?'

'Oh no; I like him a great deal.'

'I am glad of that. Do you know, he wants you to live with him always.'

'Why, I *couldn't* do that,' she exclaimed,

laughing. Then seeing me grave, her smile went suddenly, and she said, with an accent of consternation : ‘ You don’t want me to go away from you—you will not make me go to him ?’

‘ I’ll not make you do anything, Psyche, that hurts you. You shall live with me as long as you will.’

‘ Oh, my brother !’ she exclaimed, clasping my arm to her breast.

Presently I said :

‘ Would you like to have Ethel always for a companion and friend ?’

‘ I do not understand that. I cannot live always with her and with you, too.’

‘ Not while we live asunder as we do. But if I ask Ethel to live with us, and she says yes ?’

‘ She will never say yes,’ Psyche said confidently. ‘ Never—never—never.’

I laughed, and asked how she could tell that.

‘ I can tell it by what I feel,’ she answered. ‘ When she looks at you and you look at her

—when you speak low together, as you did to-night—I could cry with the pain in my heart. Then, how could she bear to see us sitting as we sit now, whispering to each other? No, no, she could not do that. It would be too much pain—more than she could bear. She would rather live alone than see that you are my brother and not hers.'

How could I tell her that I loved Ethel more than I loved her? I rose, putting off a little longer the evil hour.

Psyche rarely came down from her room before sunset; we were to dine at eight o'clock, but Sir Henry had asked me to come in the afternoon.

I went up to the house at four, and after some general conversation Sir Henry excused himself and went into the library, leaving Ethel and me to ourselves.

We strolled in the shade of the pine-wood, and there I asked Ethel to be my wife, and she came into my arms and I held her to

my breast, oblivious of everything but the crowning happiness of my life.

But presently I heard a stifled cry of pain, and looking down in surprise, I said :

‘ Why are you crying, love ?’

Ethel raised her head from my breast, and showed me a face radiant with happiness.

‘ Why should I cry ?’ she asked.

I was perplexed. I could have sworn that, as I murmured my love over her bent head, kissing the waving hair, I heard a smothered sob.

It was getting dark, when we saw Sir Henry in the drive.

‘ I am going over to fetch Psyche, my other child,’ he said.

I gave him the key of the door, content to stay with my love.

Ten minutes, perhaps, had gone by when Sir Henry appeared in the drive. He was alone and walking hastily.

‘ Where is Psyche ?’ he asked, when he was within speaking distance.

'I left her in the house when I came away.
I heard her singing in her room.'

'She is not there now,' he answered. 'She
is gone!'

CHAPTER XIII.

‘SHE is gone!’ The words struck me with dismay. I concluded at once that old Peter had succeeded in capturing poor Psyche. He was not a man who threatened idly, as the murderous attempt upon the girl’s life had already proved. I spoke my fear to Sir Henry as we ran to the cottage.

‘You have nothing to fear from him,’ he replied with confidence. ‘It is more probable that she has left the house as she did the other day when she found you gone.’

This view was partly confirmed in my mind when I found the back door unbolted. After taking a hasty glance in her rooms and round the garden we returned to The Chase. It was there she sought me before: she knew

we were to dine at the house ; it was natural to suppose that she had taken the same path, and had wandered from the open drive into the deeper shade of the park. Yet my heart sank with a fearful misgiving that the hope was delusive. We went up to the house, then, separating, we searched the alleys of the park, calling Psyche as we went. But no answer came.

I found myself on the spot where I had asked Ethel to be my wife and taken her into my arms. Then noticing a close thicket hard by, and remembering the sound of a stifled sob that had reached my ear, I felt convinced that it had come from poor Psyche's wrung heart, and that she, in seeing me embrace Ethel as I had never embraced her, had learnt for herself what I had not found courage to tell her—that I loved Ethel more than I loved her.

' My poor little sister ! ' I cried, and waited with the last hope of hearing her sweet voice echo as in the early days, ' Poor little sister ! ' Not a breath broke the awful silence.

Alone I went back to the cottage. I called her again and again in the garden, and went into the house to search in every room with blank hopelessness. Opening the door of my own room, I found a trace of her that crisped the hair on my head.

The room was strewn with fresh-cut flowers. There were flowers on my pillow, and beside them the ring that Ethel had put on her finger.

I sat down unable to go further, for this touching souvenir was too significant to be misunderstood. Our conversation of the night before came back to me; what she had said in speaking of the impossibility of Ethel living with us applied now to herself—‘she could not do that. It would be too much pain. More than she could bear. She would rather live alone than see that you are mine, and not hers.’ And she had found that it was for her to go away and live alone. But where had she wandered? I asked myself, starting up as I realized the necessity of finding the poor girl and soothing her stricken

heart at once. I did not fear suicide. Pysche scarcely knew what death was; the possibility of self-destruction was beyond her imagination. Had she simply gone along the road on and on with no other object but to get away from the place where it was too much pain to live? No. In her room I found a clue to her destination.

There was a cupboard in which she kept, with a strange love, the relics she had brought away with her from the cave. The rough serge sack in which she worked by my side in the burrow, the shoes she wore when the day's work was done, and necklace of shells that I had ground on a flint and threaded together — they were gone, and beside her bed lay all the clothes I had given her in her new life. I felt sure she had gone back to the cave, to live alone there with the memory of those happy days when her heart never ached.

It struck me that amongst those things which she could not find words to tell me about was some sort of premonition of this

return. The old life was often in her thoughts ; but she had dwelt more than usual upon the cave this last night. Long after our conversation about Ethel, she said :

‘ Brother, do you remember the pretty things we carved in the wall of the cave ? There was a piece that you marked in black that I never had time to do. Only a little more and it would be all finished.’ And later on she said : ‘ We have forgotten all about poor Caw ; I wonder if he would know me again and come on my shoulder if I called.’

With these recollections coming to my mind I ran across the downs. There was only one way to the cave that she knew—the way by which we had left it together—and that way I knew she would try to return by, not reasoning that the water must long since have silted up the tunnel. I went down the gap : to my consternation the water was up, and after following the shore some distance, I was prevented by the sea from going further.

I ran back, up the gap, and along the cliff in frenzied haste. Beyond Deadman's Point I looked down. The light had so faded that I could barely distinguish the fragments of cliff strewed on the shore from the foam of the water breaking amidst them. Presently I stood on the cliff just over the cavern and strained my eyes in the dark chaos of rocks and water below. It was there we had come out into the open day! A few jackdaws were wheeling round half-way down; their cry was to me a terrible omen. Then gulping down my choking emotion, I called for the last time :

‘ Psyche! Sister! Dear Psyche! ’

It may have been no more than imagination, and yet a cold awe chilled me to the heart, as there seemed to fall upon my ear that swelling rise and plaintive fall of the Æolian song of my sweet little helpmate.

As I rushed back along the cliff I met Sir Henry.

‘ Good God, man! ’ he cried, ‘ what is the

matter ; you look like the ghost of yourself.'

' Poor Psyche is down there !' I answered through my sobs, still running on.

' What do you mean, Thorne ?' he asked, his voice almost as broken as mine.

' She has tried to go back to the cave—I know it, I know it !—and the water has come up.'

' O God, have I this to answer for too !' he cried.

We dashed into the water like madmen, and waded and swam till the point was rounded, and then we got upon the sand, and ran again till we came among the giant boulders and ragged fragments of the fallen cliff.

And there we found her — just a little beyond the receding waters in her drabbled dress. Her hands were clasped tightly upon the string of shells I had put about her neck in days when she knew no pain, and now in her sweet child's face there was the same expression of innocent joy it had worn then.

I trust in God's mercy that at the last she forgot that there is suffering in this world, and died with the happiest memories she knew.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHE lies in the churchyard at Eccleshall. On the stone over her grave there is one word, ‘Psyche’—no more. Her loss was a terrible blow to all who had known her. Even my grandfather hobbled up to the grave as we left it, and dropped in the flowers he had gathered for that purpose ; but the one most prostrated was Sir Henry Duncan. He looked like a man who never slept. Morally and physically he seemed unable to hold up his head, and walked as if he had risen from a bed of sickness against his wish. His condition perplexed Ethel as much as it alarmed her ; it was less a mystery to me, for I was perfectly sure that in some way he was responsible for Psyche’s suffering.

'He has always suffered from occasional fits of dejection,' Ethel said to me, 'and hitherto I have been able to give him relief. But now my efforts fail; it seems as if he did not hear my voice. I wish you would persuade him to have medical advice.'

Finding him alone in the park that evening, I told him what she had said :

'Yes,' he said, 'it is time I did something. I can't go on like this, blighting the happiness of all I love. You will be over early tomorrow morning; tell her I have gone to consult the best physician I know, and shall act on his advice, no matter what it is. I can't tell her myself: she'd ask questions, and I have never told her a lie.'

He was absent the next day, and I told Ethel what he had promised to do; but I knew that he had gone no further than the rocks where Psyche perished, and that his own conscience was the only physician whose guidance he sought and intended to follow. We met him in the evening as he was coming

home, his hands behind him, his chin sunk on his breast.

'I've seen him, love—the physician,' he said, taking Ethel's hand with more tenderness than he had lately displayed. 'Says I need change. Tells me I must go away as soon as possible.'

'I thought he would advise that,' Ethel said. 'Where shall we go?'

'I shall go alone,' he said firmly, and then with an abrupt change: 'When shall you be married?'

'It is almost too early to think of that,' she replied, looking down at the crape on her dress.

'I suppose conventional considerations must be studied, even in a quiet wedding. I should have liked to wait until you were married, dear; but I don't think I must delay this—this journey. I want to avoid anything like a parting,' he continued after a pause. 'And so if I don't put in an appearance one morning you must not be alarmed. My sister is coming down with her youngsters

next week—perhaps I shall go then, perhaps before, as I can't stand children. Anyhow, I shall not say good-bye to you.'

One night at the end of the week after I had parted from Ethel, I found Sir Henry in the drive, where he waited purposely for me.

'I want to talk to you,' he said. 'Let us go on to the downs. This path is the most direct.'

We turned from the drive and walked in silence through the shade.

'Do you believe in expiation, Thorne?' he asked suddenly.

'If you mean reparation——' I began.

He interrupted me impatiently.

'There are some injuries that can never be repaired. Do you believe that a man may get his soul out of hell by an act of self-sacrifice—that is what I mean.'

'No. To injure one's self for having injured another doubles the offence.'

'If a man may cry quits with society when he has served his term in gaol for breaking society's laws, why should not a man's con-

science be at peace when he has inflicted upon himself the punishment he deserves? How else is he to get his soul out of that hell where the vulture of reproach tears at it night and day? There is no other way by which he may hope to meet those he loves hereafter.'

'But for that fear of something after death,' he continued in a lower tone, speaking to himself rather than addressing me, 'the fear of facing one fair-haired, sweet-faced child, and but for the *hope* of meeting my dear daughter—escape from this purgatory would be easy and quick enough.'

The path was bounded by a deep ditch; we leapt it; but on the other side Sir Henry stopped as if he had recalled something to his mind; and instead of skirting across the downs, as had seemed his intention, he followed the edge of the ditch till it ran into a deep cleft in the cliff whence the drainage was carried off.

The cleft was deep, but not more than six or eight feet wide at the surface, and it grew

deeper as it went down to the outlet on the shore. Following the cleft for some twenty paces, Sir Henry stopped at a point where the turf showed that a load of lime had been thrown there.

'I had lime shot in,' he said, 'because there is something dead and putrid down there. Peter Beamish is down there. I shot him through the head that night, you remember.'

'Is that the crime you are going to expiate?' I asked.

He laughed hoarsely. 'Crime!' he exclaimed. 'I think no more of having shot that cursed villain through the head than if he had been a mad dog.'

He kicked a clod down the cleft, and as it fell with a thud on the lime that covered old Peter, he said :

'Fancy a thing like that—a vile ignorant ruffian, ninety and odd—keeping me under his thumb for a dozen years, holding me at his mercy, threatening my daughter with life-long disgrace! With a little more wit he

might have taken every penny of my ill-gotten fortune from me. You must know by this time that I am the man who gave him that child to sink out at sea. Every meeting we had was in the dark, and under a disguise I believed he could not recognise me ; but he did. He was used to the night ; it was part of his old business to penetrate disguise and know what sort of man he had to deal with. He told me how they had discovered her and brought her to life. But no bribe would induce him to give her up to me or tell me where I could find her. Perhaps your grandfather had something to do with that. He thought, maybe, that, having tried to destroy her once, I only wanted to get her again to do the deed effectually. For twelve years that went on. Then I saw your advertisement in the *Times*, and answered it through a firm of solicitors in London. When I learnt from them that the girl you had found was the child I had tried to murder, I lost my head, and Peter Beamish coming to me at that very moment for money, and with his

usual threats of exposure, I defied him to produce the girl, and so, like a fool, put him on the scent. He had told me that the child was a stout, healthy wench in service as a bar-maid ; I expected to find her vulgar, coarse, robust. You can imagine the shock when I heard the truth, and found the sweet, fresh little thing whose wasted life I had to answer for. God knows I did not mean to bury her alive. You ask why I tried to kill the child : I have brought you here to tell. Not that I may excuse myself, but that it may lessen my child's shame when the truth is known. I married in direct defiance to my father's wish. He disinherited me. I, a spendthrift, a ne'er-do-well who had never occupied myself with one serious consideration, found myself unable to earn a living. My wife died. Ethel was sick ; my last guinea was paid for the advice of a physician. He declared that Ethel could be saved by being taken to Madeira for a time, but could never live through the winter in this climate. At that juncture my father died leaving everything to

an adopted infant, for he, like me, was a friendless, unlovable man. By a strange coincidence the adopted child was weak, not expected to outlive childhood. My father knew this, and left his fortune to her with a reversion to me simply, as a means of prolonging my punishment for a few years longer. And now this question was presented to me : Should I suffer my own child to die when I might save her life by destroying the child who was not expected to live ? I did not hesitate an instant. My child was everything to me ; the other was nothing to anybody. I stole the child, and, as I believed, took her life away with an opiate. I believed that she was dead when I gave her into the hands of Peter Beamish. My God deny me mercy if this is untrue ! He paused, and then in a softened tone he said : 'I do not wish to exonerate myself. Time will show that I have paid the penalty for the woe I brought upon poor unhappy Psyche.'



He did not return to The Chase. Ethel tried to believe that her father was seeking relief from physical suffering abroad. A month passed and we heard no tidings of him. One day my grandfather came to me, with a scared look in his face.

'Sonny,' he said in the hectoring tone he had learned from his father, 'you're got to come along of me. You're got to put on your hat and ask no questions, but just take what I've got to give you as we goes along.'

I put on my hat and went out with him. We turned in the direction of the Halfway House. 'I don't see much good in reformin'," he began as we trudged along. 'Seems to me if you go a bit out o' your right course at the fust that not all the tracks and total abstaining in life ain't going to put you straight agen.'

'What's the matter?' I asked.

'You speak when you're spoke to, and not afore, sonny, or you'll go wrong like the rest o' the family.'

Having walked on some distance in silence to let this warning sink in, he recommenced :

‘I dunnow what’s the use on it. Here’s father been out on the loose for a month, and never come anigh me; it don’t signify anything that I ain’t touched so much as twopennorth, and been a-cocking my eye up at the textes all the while, not a bit :—here’s more trouble come. As if it warn’t enough dreamin’ every night of the young un, and wakin’ up all a shiver and a sweat, thinkin’ I’d forgot to send down her victuals ! It gets over me, that it do.’ He stopped, his old chin twitched, and he looked out over the sea with blank dejection. The sight of his cottage roused him. He turned his quid, and, knitting his brows said :

‘You’re got to go down in that cave agen, sonny.’

I stopped short, chilled to the heart at the very thought of revisiting the scene of my poor Psyche’s captivity.

‘Come on—you’re got to go,’ he said doggedly. ‘I’d go myself if I’d got the

strength, and it ain't the fear of not comin' up agen stops me, neither. I dunnow what's the good of a old fellow like me a-hanging on in this world.'

'Who is down there?' I asked, the truth flashing upon me.

'He's down there—Sir Henry Duncan.'

'How long has he been there?'

'A month, sonny. He come to me and told me I should have the old cottage as long as I lived if I served him as I served the young un. And seein' it was kinder right and pious he should do by hisself as others had been done by through him I agreed to it. Day by day I've whistled to him like—well, as near as I could like I whistled to her; but there warn't no pretty song come back; he emptied the basket all right, but with never a sound till it come yesterday, and all day long I was a-calling him and a-whistling, but no answer come, and this morning the victuals is in the basket just as I left 'em. So you're got to go down and see what's amiss.'

I went down, sick with apprehension and

the dull pain of awakened memories. Once more I lit the candle, and groped along the passage into the shadowy cave. I found him stretched out dead on Psyche's bed, with the evidence of Psyche's life about him. In the alcove over his head hung strips of the coloured rags she had hung there for ornament ; in the wall the scroll she cut ; in the sand a print of her little foot. What place, what means, could he have found more fitting for his terrible expiation ?

* * * *

The clouds have lifted ; the sun shines now. Ethel is my wife, and when I hold her hand in mine I feel that all the happiness heaven can give is mine.

Last night we lingered long in the garden after the afterglow faded away ; the heavens filled with stars, and we walked slowly in silent happiness.

‘ Hush ! ’ murmured Ethel, stopping. ‘ Did you hear it ? ’

A faint sound far away rose and fell, and so died away imperceptibly.

'There it is again,' she whispered low. 'It is the first nightingale.'

It sounded to my ears like the lost voice of Psyche, singing of the new happiness of a new world.

THE END.

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